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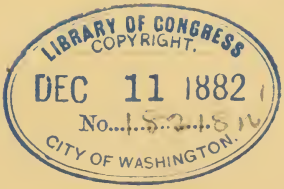
THE WIZARD'S TALE

OR

A TRACE OF PARADISE

A Fragment.



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1882.

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NOTE.

The writer, sojourning and sketching in a fairy valley and its environs, and having a suit with one Prince Ringdove, chances to read a beautiful old legend-like tale,* which enables him to win, and is embodied, with some new imagery, to give it the form of an epic, in the following stanzas.

* Baron von Humboldt's personal narrative.

THE WIZARD'S TALE

OR

A TRACE OF PARADISE.

A FRAGMENT.

In olden times (so spoke the tale),
When hate towards strangers did prevail,
What wonder 'twas that fairy land
The law to aliens had banned!
A wizard, more than others learned,
To the sweet vale his footsteps turned,
With passport from the king;
He promised golden mines to find,
Albeit was native science blind,
And home rich treasure bring.

The priests that voyage had forbade,
But that the crown objections swayed,
Ere took the soothsayer wing.
Power had he wild beasts to tame,
And anthropophagi to shame,
Who might his mission stay,
And knowledge of the stars withal,
And could fair maidens' hearts enthrall,
By music, charm and lay;
And love-draughts knew he, too, as well,
Lest should the fickle swain rebel,
Or prove, alas! unkind,
More potent than the greatest spell
That e'er bewitched the mind!

The wizard thro' deep forests rowed,
Where never mortal had abode,
And watery ways did swell;
Up angry streams, where ne'er before

Had human bark a traveller bore,
He sailed, I wis, as well.
Serpents lre found of every kind
That in the lonely floods did wind,
And oft upon the shore.
Alas! 'twas all of no avail,
No gold mine met he on his trail,
Nor even silver ore.
Chagrined, I trow, was he indeed,
His prowess to no end did lead,
But only useless toil.
Thought he, "How can I now return?
Will not the king my story spurn,
And all my future foil;
And say I am at best a spy,
Who would the jealous spell untie
That guards this Eden fair,
And blab its mysteries away,—
Albeit ne'er stranger till this day
To visit it did dare?"

Still sped he on, nor tired he,
He would the wondrous country see,
That was so hidden kept.
To dell he climbed, and highest peak,
Where grew fair flowers he did not seek,
And on the rocks he slept.
Two jaguars followed at his side,
Like mastiffs, nor was either tied;
Sober tho' they kept his path,
He could wake at will their wrath.
Thro' mire and plain he forced his way,
He laughed at dangers his step would stay.
Was he, perchance, a being of air,
That nothing his mystic thews could wear,
Or goblin of unearthly make,
Stronger than shapes that mortals take?
Else how could he such tasks sustain,
Fevers, mosquitoes, sun and rain?
Nor how through roaring waters' flow,
Could he up foaming rapids go,
In wooden, weak canoe,

At risk of foundering in the tide,
Or by a crocodile being eyed,
And bitten e'en in two?

What mighty spell was in the land,
To bring the wizard from foreign strand,
At hazard of his health?
He visited every wondrous grot,
Nor left unseen a single spot
Where might be secret wealth.
How lovely was that strange new world,
As tho' from depths of ocean hurled
Suddenly to view!
Mayhap a thousand years or more,
Buried it was in times of yore
Beneath the crystal blue;
Breezes now blew o'er it fair,
Sunshine gladdened the dreamy air,
And flowers o'er it grew;

Giant trees waved over all,
None before were seen so tall,
And 'neath them fountains sprung;
Birds of every song and hue
Thro' the shady branches flew,
With sweet and tuneful tongue;
All was bright, and void of care
Were the happy people there,
And in their networks swung.

The wizard went thro' every part;
He had, indeed, a mighty heart,
As for such toil was meet.
The Indian's cabin oft he sought,
Poisons to boil to him they taught,
And huge baked ants to eat,
And how the feathered shaft to send;
He well the graceful bow could bend,
Nor oft, I wis, did miss.

Still quailed they when he so did choose,
His mystic powder gun to use;
And wondered at its hiss.
He the bright sunshine could quell,
Lightning he could forge as well,
And cause the rain to fall;
And laughed he at their silly fears,
And at their youthful maidens' tears,
Albeit were beauteous all.
Angel or demon must he be
To make those hardy woodmen flee,
Tho' bred were they to war.
They sought his clemency to gain,
The best their cupboard did contain
They added to his store.

He learned the Cannibal mode of life,
And how they gave away a wife,
When loved a youthful chief;
His hands were sealed, oh, wishful swain!

A weary fast must he sustain,
To aggravate his grief;
Then smarting under the ordeal,
Albeit 'twas ordered for his weal,
To wed he is not free;
Some proof must still he quickly show
Of his address with spear or bow,
To merit his degree.
Then was the trial followed up
By dance and song and merry cup,
And lauded was the bride,—
And races with the swift canoe
As well did speedily ensue,
Upon the river wide.
A truce from fighting was ordained,
And thro' the honeymoon maintained,
Except, mayhap, sham frays;
Thus all was joy, two weeks or more,
No one thought again of war,
For many festive days.

Some time among this awful race
He stayed, and helped them in the chase,
And heard their tales of battle dread,
How on their prisoners they fed.
At times, tho' rare, their very kin
(Oh! fearful, most unnatural sin!)
They killed to make a dainty meal,
Nor let remorse once o'er them steal.
The females met the same dark fate,
Their daughters and their wives they ate.
Albeit the sorcerer was bold,
These cruel stories made him cold,
And hoped he his release was near;
He loathed those horrid men of fear.
Still was he safe, 'twas not their will
Their mighty Foreign guest to kill,
Or else mayhap they did not dare,—
Kind words they spoke to him, and fair;
So still with them he hunted oft,
And struck the feathered tribe aloft,

There where luxuriant forests grew
He sent the poisoned arrow true,
Or in the rapid shady stream
He speared the fish that 'neath did gleam.

Each step the sorcerer advanced,
When left he those sad men at last,
More marvels started to his view,
Stranger the wondrous country grew.
When next he laid him down to sleep,
Feelings new did o'er him creep;
Half woman was his host, half man,
Whose sylvan form he now did scan.
With feminine breasts, so full and round,
Fair theme a painter there had found,
Their faultless charm to picture true:
Albeit of snow was not their hue,
But dusky, or a copper shade,
Like that the entire shape arrayed.

An infant at one breast did cling,
The while the mystic host did sing;
For lo! was such that being so strange,
That seemed from male to female change.
Strong were his limbs, his stature tall,
His voice was like a trumpet call,
But softened were his features wild,
As gazed he on his infant child,
Placid his eyes, serene his mood,
Like deity of the silent wood.

The sorcerer paled. "Am I awake?"
He would the awful mystery break,
Nor knew he what to say;
Yet soon he found 'twas e'en no dream,
Tho' more than magic it did seem,
And fear did make him pray.
"This is enchanted ground," thought he,
And straight his hardihood did flee,
Lest he was in a snare,

And gladly would his steps retrace,
Nor follow up the wild-goose chase,
But seek gold mines elsewhere.
Still reasoned he, "Oh, dreadful sin,
That monsters such could ever win
In place so fair a hold!"
And e'en tho' was the savage kind,
Already for his freedom pined,
The wizard, albeit bold.
Thought he, "'Tis mine with men to deal,
I can them make my power feel,
As oft indeed I've shown;
But this one doth his sex belie,
Spells 'gainst such I dare not try,
To make his will my own."

Much had, I trow, the wizard read,
In foreign lands he oft did tread,
In search of occult lore;

Well known to Egypt was his fame,
Its ancient magic he o'ercame,
Tho' labor he did sore;
That country where had science birth
First recognised his zealous worth,
And honored him indeed.
The pyramids he looked into,
Their manuscripts by heart he knew,
Their idols and their creed;
The catacombs he e'en went through,
Mummies of old times to view,
And on the Nile did go.
And hatching ovens, too, did spy,
Where hens from two-yolked eggs did fly,
That like a cock did crow.
And every race the wide world bore
He travelled thro' from hill to shore,
To help his studious need.
Then mused he, "Have I scaled the sky?
Sole there may figures meet the eye,
Of such a mystic breed!"

Soon saw he 'twas not one alone
Of those 'mong whom his fate was thrown,
This dubious fashion held,
For many thro' the trees did glide,
As roved he in the forest wide,
Like him he first beheld.
He doubted not but it was true,
In regions of the ethereal blue
He did at last revel,
Else whence those creatures not of Earth,
Whose figure spoke a fabled birth,
Like legends only tell?
Amazed, he sat beneath a tree,
And gazed on river and on lea;
Sweet flowers all around did spring,
And painted birds did gaily sing;
Changed seemed the color of the sky,
Deeper was its azure dye,
And fragrant was the balmy air
That whispered in his curly hair.

Long sat he there, lulled by the shade,
Dreamy thoughts around him played;
Nor roused he till the sun was high,
And mingled with the winds his sigh.

A week he tarried with the tribe,
Nor asked they for their favor bribe;
Then saw he, and the fair it shames,
No lovely breasts adorned the dames.
As with the Cannibals of late,
So with this mystic tribe he ate!
Their manner did his trust invite,
His recent tremors were more light.
If he the country would explore,
They helped him o'er the ground to pore,
But tho' they found some gravel bright,
That sparkled with a yellow light,
Alas! it was not gold!
Still hope the sorcerer did cheer;
He vowed he yet would persevere;

He cared not for those people odd,
But on his road again he trod,
Thro' brier and marsh and wold;
Not e'en that sunny place could stay
His dark and solitary way.
His faithful jaguars left him not,
But gambolled by his side, I wot,
Nor ever once did growl;
Yet if unfriendly noise they heard,
Then quick instead of warning word,
They each set up a howl.

What torrents passed he in his way,
To tell were needless, vain delay;
Twice a mountain unawares,
Guiltless of steps to climb or stairs,
His even path did stop;
Nor could he clear it at a bound,
He had to make a circuit 'round,
Then on again did hop.

Monkeys chattered as he past,
Like evil spirits o'er him cast,
But not, I wis, to greet;
And creeping vines his limbs oft held,
And stony labyrinths he quell'd,
With scathless, nimble feet.
Lions 'twixt the trees did stare,
To see him, and his cortege rare,
In place so far and lone;
And on each side, the wold did seem
By fits, with every voice to scream,
Of sylvan beasts unknown.
How he ever found his way,
Gliding still from day to day,
Would all philosophy floor;
You would have guessed, as on he went,
Nor ever from his purpose bent,
He knew the road before.

At length one misty dawn, away,
When still the shadowy morn was grey,

A glimmer white straight on his road,
A sign of habitation showed,
That as he more advanced his view,
Soon, lo! to various houses grew;
And curling smoke that upward roll'd,
A scene of busy life foretold;—
I wis no wild man's wigwams those,
They more like genial dwellings rose.
The wizard hurried on elate,
Tired he was of Indian prate;
Nor more with beings, albeit divine,
He could not well their sex define,
He cared, I trow, to roam,
But would once more his ears regale
With listening to the white man's tale,
And think again of home.
E'en tho' mayhap had failed to foil,
His strength, those many days of toil,
Still fain he would repose.
A garden gate he found, tho' locked,

No soul he saw, he gently knocked,
The while his wonder rose.

Still was he glad to be on earth,
Breathed all around a mundane birth,
Nor aught could he accuse.
Fair flowers bloomed within the gate,
Some in vases of ancient date,
And fragance did diffuse.
The house e'en had a foreign air,
With tiled roof, and built with care;
'Twas plain no natives there did bide,
Tho' in the woods it seemed to hide,
With whitewashed walls, so bright and neat,
Fitting a pleasant country seat;
Indeed, those savage wilds it mocked.
Again more loud our hero knocked,
Nor longer did he have to wait.
A figure black undid the gate,
A friar was the comer new,

As cowl and cassock spoke him true.
"Good day!" with greeting kind, said he,
"We shut no door on such as thee—
Not oft comes traveller this way,
Pray make our little house thy stay;
Albeit so black my face doth show,
'Tis mosquito bites hath made it so!"

Scarce could the sorcerer believe,
Still must not priestly lip deceive,
Nor welcome was the startling tale,
At once our hero's cheek was pale.
"Good lack!" mused he, "if here I stay,
My fairness soon will slip away;
Yet nay! so gold my loss requite,
I'll e'en endure mosquito's bite.
When did venture yet yield gold,
Save to the patient and the bold!
How, i' faith, the world will stare,
If prove my promise empty air,

And laugh, and say, we thought you knew—
What everybody did but you!
Then Friar can no miser be,
And if be treasure here, thought he,
He surely will not grudge it me;
What boon for such were silly gold,
Who life so lonely here doth hold?
Besides he seems both bent and old—
Mayhap some trinkets more he'll prize
Such as do charm the Indians' eyes
Ribbons have I, black and blue,
Wooden crosses, as well, a few,
And beads, fit for a rosary, too."

Thus would the wary wizard try
The friar's honest soul to buy,
And quick his ardent mind did dream
Of hidden treasures' golden gleam,
Rich with a virgin flame,

Enough his labor to repay,
And pave his happy future way
To honor and to fame.
'Twere hard to see his voyage lost,
Cheap would be gold at any cost,
To shelter him from shame.
Who knows what guerdon might he earn,
When to the king he should return,
And all his wealth display;
Nor what his fair renown would be,
When he upon his bended knee
His wondrous tale should say!
How would be cast into the shade,
Travels which had others made,
And how would shout the gaping crowd,
And minstrels sing his praise aloud
In many a tuneful lay,
And say was never such a man
Since erst the world to roll began,
And night preceded day!

Quick many friars gathered there,
Some on fleetest coursers rare;
Scarce to believe his view he durst,
Black were they all, just like the first!
"Zounds!" thought the wizard, almost faint,
"How the mosquitoes here do paint!"
Still mortal mien had they all,
With accents fair, and kind withal;
So genial was indeed their air,
Quick was dispell'd the wizard's care,
Tho' in a land so strange and new,
At once his wonted courage grew.
Fain would they know who was their guest,
That thus their lonely dwelling blest,
And what adventure brought him there,
Alone, their holy roof to share.
Their house was to the wanderer free,
Tho' dubious still who might he be—
No robber surely thus could dare,
He seemed to have a foreign air.

Their gaze took in his form and face,
And much they wondered at his grace,
And saw how well his nerves were knit,
For toil and long endurance fit;
Nor e'en despised his escort rare,
The darkly spotted jaguar pair.

The wizard's story soon was told,
"My kingly pass," he said, "behold!"
The mounted friars got off to hear,
And heard with wonder mixed with fear,
How with the Cannibals he fared,
And at the men, half female, stared,
And all the perils of his road
Since he had left his last abode.
Said he, "I wis nor love nor gain
Would make me do the thing again;
Nor had I ever found my way,
Lone, and untaught, from day to day,
But that the jaguars seemed to know

How the dubious path did go,
And ever kept a good lookout,
Lest should be enemies about."
The hair of the friars stood on end,
As they their listening ears did lend,
Nor scarcely could believe it true—
He had indeed so much gone through,
And was alive, and safe, and well,
Was it not a mystic spell?

Again the wizard took repose,
As meet was after all his woes;
The friars with a lavish hand
Gave him the comforts of their band.
Then ate he first "casave" bread,
Fat poultry for his table bled,
And eggs they furnished him as well,
With spoons to eat them from the shell;
Albeit indeed the spoons were wood.
He laughed, for merry was his mood,

Scarce had he been so well regaled
Since he from o'er the sea had sailed.
A hammock had he for his bed,
Nor from his eyes sweet slumber fled;
No noise disturbed him in the night—
He waked ere early dawn was bright;
He heard the friars to and fro,
He heard, was it a cow did low?
How strange those sounds came on his ear
But genial too were they to hear.
The morn such dreamy fragance shed,
He dosed, and hugged his airy bed,
And when he fain must leave his rest,
'Twas with a yawn he rose and dressed.

He walked among the houses few,
And their economy did view;
In one a chapel soon he found,
It was the little hamlet bound,

With altar-piece of ancient day,
Gilded, but in sad decay—
And crucifix of time unknown,
On which full many a stain had grown ;
And to a school one door did lead,
Where Indian children learned to read—
'Twas like a dreamy oasis fair,
To pilgrim worn by travel's care.
A change came o'er the wizard then,
He praised those hospitable men,
Who to that fearful wildness lone
Could so e'en give a Christian tone.
"How calm," tho't he, "do things look here!
E'en will I halt in my career,
And stay my thirst for gold apace,
If here there be no hidden trace!"
But quick his rash resolve took wing,
Sudden he felt the mosquito's sting,
And must he home for shelter run,
Ere well his early stroll was done.

Soon did his doleful tale he tell,
His face already 'gan to swell,
Dismayed he knew not what to think;
Was it his priestly host did wink?
"'Tis even so," he simply said,
"At first the sting is always red;
'Twas wrong in you without a guide,
And venturesome, to walk so wide.
I never saw a sting like that,
It must have been a thirsty gnat."
The friar used his healing art,
And unguents to soothe the smart;
An Indian woman helped his lore,
And quick the patient's pain was o'er.
At once he chid his silly thought,
How best the good man might be bought,
Nor thought he of his ribbons more,
His beads, and wooden crosses store,
But feared the sting was e'en a sign
To warn him, sent by heaven divine.

And turn him from his errand back,
Changed from a white man to a black.
"My very father would me spite,—
I hope no poison's in the bite!"

The wizard asked who was the maid
The friar's holy skill did aid,
If captive she, the girl he saw,
Or if she learned the Christian law?
"Slaves we must have," the friar said,
"We give them home, and clothes and bread,
But they are of a wayward mind,
Albeit we treat them well and kind.
True, once it happed in times before,
Tradition tells the story o'er,
How one was from her children torn,
And to this very place was borne,
To serve our fathers long ago,—
It is a tale of Indian woe—

That very night her bonds she broke,
And fled before her captors woke.
Ah me! how sad the road to trace,
Ere she her lost ones could embrace!
Far, far away must wander she,
And sleep at night upon a tree,—
Through flooded woods she had to roam,
But reached at last her wigwam home!
It was a miracle that day,
She did not die upon the way.

"Brief raptures her's! scarce had she gone,
With frighted step, as timid fawn,
Our fathers on her traces sped,
And once again their captive led.
Vain were her shrieks, her struggles vain,
They pushed her over hill and plain,
In vain her children wept and sued;
Unmoved, their tears the fathers viewed.

In a frail boat they bade her go,
She knew not how would end her woe,—
And as they passed not wide from shore,
She tried to free herself once more,
Tho' hopeless seemed the plashy leap,
And plunged beneath the river deep.
She swam, 'tis said she gained the land,
But could not 'scape the monkish band;
Nor e'en her certain fate elude,
Since she was not the fishes' food!
Their charge e'en farther than before,
Unhappy one! our fathers bore;
It was, I wis, a dreary road,
E'en must she seek a new abode,
Where brethren by our Order bound,
Had settled on more distant ground.

"With stronger ligaments than the last,
Again they made their victim fast.

In vain she thought again to break
Her prison for her dear ones' sake,—
And when she saw was fruitless all,
And she a hopeless, captive thrall,
She raved about her Indian home,—
She would once more in freedom roam,
Where luscious fruits grew over all,
And hear the trickling waterfall,—
And meet the hunter when he came,
Laden at eve with sylvan game.
No more she let herself be fed,
She would not taste her captor's bread,
But pined away in wild lament,
Till to the shades her spirit went.
E'en felt the friars much surprise,
To see such soul in Indian guise.
Mayhap before the world ne'er saw
An angel like the Indian squaw.
E'en now do mothers tell the tale
And much her cruel fate bewail,—

She was a martyr to her love,
And, doubtless, is a saint above."

The friar shuddered as he spoke,
Nor could his zeal his pity cloak.
The wizard wished he had been there;
Perchance his word had made them spare;
He had been her champion knight,
The drooping, injured fair to right,—
Nor could he see the captive pain,
And aid her not with might and main,
Else had he been a devil born,
Worthy of hate and worthy of scorn,—
It had been chivalric deed,
To save the youthful squaw indeed!
He pictured her before his mind
As brave and beautiful and kind,
Imploring succor from his hand!
Then had he dared the holy band,—

And sent her home once more to rove
By dancing brook and murmuring grove.
Mayhap by purchase he had won
From them the sadly martyred one;
Mayhap his spells had made them fear,
Dreadful to see and dreadful to hear!
'Twas hard one's freedom to be bann'd,
To die a slave in strangers' hand.

Yet showed the wizard not his mind,
By word of censure spoke unkind;
But kept the tale within his breast,—
He would the friar not molest.
Time passed, perforce he must reveal
The thought he could no more conceal,
And questioned of the father old
If knew he where he might find gold.
The friar stared, as quick he guessed
What 'twas the wizard's soul distressed,

And shook his head, in meaning show,
The query did surprise him so!
Said he, "'Tis thing we need not here,—
'Twere vain, unknown and worthless gear;
What wants we have our lands produce,
For gold we never could have use.
We till, and harvests fair repay
The trifling labor we outlay;
If trap we in the forest deep,
Abundant game we get, and cheap,
With this is rich our humble church,
I fear thou'lt have a weary search;—
Still may you further on succeed,
For diligence to reward should lead.

"More to the south, but little known,
Where flit bright birds in bowers lone,
A tribe of Indians dwell,—

Of genial, peaceful habits they,
Their village by a stream doth lay
That sable waters swell.
To get there is no easy task,
Nor will I e'en the dangers mask
Between this place and there.
A strip of land you needs must cross,
And on men's brawny shoulders toss
The bark that must thee bear.
A flooded wood you'll come to, vast,
I have myself its labyrinth passed,
It is a gloomy way,
For so the lofty branches blend
Their foliage at the topmost end,
It quenches Phœbus' ray.
Then will burst on thee like a dream
The dark, and deep, and mighty stream
That few did e'er sail down.
Fear not its waters, tho' so black,
They'll guide thee o'er its even track
Straight to the Indian town.

"It may be there thy guest thou'lt find,
The Indians are both frank and kind,
And will thee answer true—
Some commerce have they now and then,
Tho' rare, with wandering merchantmen,
Who for their toys do sue.
Rich wares are these of texture rare,
Spoils of birds that live in air,
Of plumage fair to view,—
Vests and bonnets thus they sell,
And hammock ornaments as well,
Of gold and green and blue.
Mayhap the sun doth gild more fair
The wings of yonder songsters there,
So brilliant is their hue,—
Mayhap 'tis their fair artists' eyes
That help the lustre of the dyes,
It is likely too.
The chieftain once, a man well meant,
To a neighboring isle a hammock sent,

For a Governor to swing;
So much the trinket did surprise,
The Governor, who was just and wise,
Scarce believed it mortal thing."

The wizard heard the friar's tale,
He sped upon the given trail.
The friar all his wants supplied—
Canoe, and Indian paddlers tried,
And prayed he might succeed—
Yet mingled warning with advice,
And bade him weigh the matter twice,
Of his adventurous deed.
It was but vain and silly talk
To hope the wizard bold to balk,—
Thought he, "The friar once of yore
Himself did gain the Indian shore,
And prythee why not I?"
The while the father's wasted form,
No longer fit to brave the storm,
He measured with his eye.

He bade his kindly host adieu,
He parted with his swarthy crew;
And when he gained the strip of land,
His bark they bore with nervous hand:
It was a woful track.
He threaded next the watery wood,
And on the lonely border stood,
Of the river black.

Awhile he gazed, his face was pale,
Mayhap his bright blue eye did quail;
Unearthly seemed the darksome tide,
As silent flowed its waters wide,—
Nor ever had before he seen
So broad a stream as that, I ween.
He doubted if he viewed aright,
Or was enchantment in the sight!
Men, rivers, trees, in that new land
Were all so mighty and so grand!

And much he envied then the king
That held the key to such a thing,
And could its realms so firmly keep
From prying strangers' curious peep,—
And mused the wizard, "It is strange,
If gold there be not in its range!
Else still imperfect were this shore,
Without a portion of the ore.
Adown this gloomy stream I'll go,
Mayhap it will not lead to woe;
Perchance e'en yet may fortune crown
My toil and ventures with renown;
Then will my thanks the friar hold,
That put me on the road to gold."

He launched his bark upon the wave,
He would not be a recreant knave,
And more his fear and wonder grew
As down the sable stream they flew;

For had the paddlers set a sail,
And freshly blew the scented gale.
What contrast was the scene around
To the silent river's bound!
For flowers grew on shore and shore,
As on the mournful flood they bore,
And lent such sweetness to the air,
It half removed the wizard's care.
Still it was a lonely sail,—
No house looked on their watery trail—
And when at length the evening wore,
Was heard the distant tiger's roar.
No sleep the wizard's eyelids closed,
Tho' once mayhap he almost dozed.
Day dawned, and still the river ran,
Black as when the night began!
"Was it treachery in the guides,
That yet no village met their strides?"
And soon was his discomfort more,
Huge rain-drops commenced to pour.

Soon lulled the wind, before a gale,
Hung listless to the mast the sail,—
Still flowed the stream, nor changed its hue,
Perchance the wave more spectral grew!
Oh, was he in dark Lethe's pool,
That tide that knows no mortal rule?
And might not fatal errand be
In the bark of the sable Devotee?"
So silent 'twas on either shore,
It all enhanced his fears the more!
Save the rain, no voice he heard,
But the shrill scream of water bird,
That mayhap startled by the boat,
Rose quickly with discordant note.
Then memory brought him back to view,
All his past pilgrimage anew;
Nor aught in all his travels wide
He thought so dread as that dark tide,
As scarcely with a plash it crept—
You almost would have thought it slept.

Still kept his peace the wizard bold,
Albeit had fled his dreams of gold,
And fain would know in his despair
How might end the stream and where;
And if it held its hellish dye
Till lost in realms of night for aye!

Still plied their oars the boatmen grim,
Albeit the misty air was dim—
The fitful, dropping rain passed o'er,
And fair was Phœbus' face once more.
He looked upon the waters dark,
And flashed each sable wave a spark.
Yet was it but a labor sore,
As worked each rower at his oar—
And slowly 'twas, alas! they sped;
The breeze returned, but veered ahead!
Then changed the wizard's varying fear—
Thought he, "May fail provision here—

And how replace it from the shore,
If soon again we have no more?"
He called to mind the cannibal brood,
He would not be the boatmen's food,
If to such strait they came indeed,
On human flesh to make them feed!
Tempted he felt to swim to shore,
Like the poor Indian girl of yore,
Tho' it were but to change his fate,
To be by cruel boas ate!
Just then he heard a faint low moan,
It was his faithful jaguar's groan.

His wakeful guard thus bade him stay
His doubts, that led his hope astray,
And o'er his weary eyes came sleep:
He dreamt he grasped a yellow heap
Of ductile golden ore—
While onward roll'd the river deep,
As silent as before.

'Tis sweet thus lull'd to have one's fear,
When musing most one's fate is near,
And ready seems the gaping snare
To take one from this world of care.
Still idle were his tremors then;
The tawny crew were loyal men,
And well did know the toilsome way,
Nor uttered plaint at their delay,
But let the wizard dream apace;
They cared not his repose to chase,
And wondered at his courage strong
Could brook the gloomy voyage long.
E'en as he slept the goal was nigh,
Indian canoes came paddling by,
Like shadows forward cast—
And when at last the wizard woke,
The joyful words that first he spoke
Were, "Here we are at last!"

'Twas with at first no small surprise
He saw the wildmen's houses rise;

Fair, mayhap, did they appear
To one but just escaped his fear;
Still were the dwellings poor indeed—
Of walls the Indians had no need:
Four upright posts the roof did bear,
With naught between but empty air.
Defence was none of any kind,
To shelter from the rain or wind,
Except the shed of palm leaves knit,—
For goats the covering scarce was fit.
The inmates' hammocks there did swing,
Free from poisonous reptiles' sting.
Quick mused the wizard, "Far I come,
Through perils, too, a heavy sum;
This cheerless hamlet scarce repays
The vigils of these anxious days;
Nor know I yet if love or hate
For me within the town doth wait."
He wished himself safe back again
In the sable priest's domain,

And measured with repentant mind
The dismal path he left behind,
If he would then his steps retrace,
To seek once more the friar race.

A contrast was the Indian strand
With the peaceful, priestly band,
Nor had the wizard yet before
Bewailed his lonely mission more;
Still must he, for the friar's sake,
Fair trial of the red men make,
Nor yet despond, but keep his trust;
Here might he find the golden dust,—
Then were past perils little worth,
Requited by the priceless earth!
The paddlers hauled the boat on shore,
Glad I trow the sail was o'er;
But as the wizard gazed in awe,
'Twas only women that he saw.
These came the friar's bark to meet,
And in brief words the crew did greet.

The men that day were hunting wide,
Or fishing in the sable tide;
While they were gone, the strong and bold,
The females tended each household.
In novel wise, that made him stare,
Some held a warrior's squalling heir;
Astraddle 'gainst the mother's side,
Clung fast the absent father's pride.

Still was their welcome kind and warm,
Albeit, mayhap, devoid of form:
To see the lonely stranger, came
Quick hurrying every Indian dame;—
Perchance was greater their surprise
Than tokened late the friar's eyes.
Not oft had white man travelled there,
They marvelled at his skin so fair.
"Oh, was he spirit of the tide,
That broke from out its gloomy side?"

But soon they shuddered, awed, amazed,
As on his sylvan guard they gazed,
Nor questioned if the beasts would bite,
But ran in anger and affright;
It needed well the paddlers' lore
To bring each truant back once more.
"How could they be so weak and rude,
To leave their guest in such a mood!
What would the absent warriors say,
When they came home at set of day?"
Abashed, the wizard bold they bade
Walk in beneath their rustic shade;
Green palms they gave him for a seat,
And plantains roasted whole to eat.

These savored to him much of bread,
And quite as palatable instead.
Refreshed, they led him o'er the ground—
Plantain trees were all around:

E'en without culture up they sprung,
And gently to the breeze they swung,
Albeit their wondrous leaves were riven
When was the gale against them driven.
Above, their luscious fruit they bore,
In every stage, a goodly store,
Some ripe, some green, and some in flower;
He sipped sweet honey from the bower.
Thus to repair, the women sought,
Their late unfriendly, hostile thought.
"How happy must the people be,
Can live in common thus!" mused he,—
"E'en tho' is Eden painted fair,
Its inmates were a lonely pair;
If they perchance would dance or sing,
There was not one to touch a string."
He hoped might there his travels end,
Nor more his flagging patience spend;
So he got gold, no more he'd roam,
But make awhile that place his home.

Tho' still crept by the river dire,
No more his awe it did inspire.

It was a most unholy thought,
With pride and heathenism fraught.
The friars had been wroth to find
What then was in the wizard's mind;
Yet still mayhap he had excuse,
Nor meant the Bible to abuse.
The warriors came at evening fair,
And lauded much the women's care;
What marvel if the wizard guessed
Might there have been the garden blessed;
A site which travellers oft to find
Had perils braved of every kind.
"E'en might the tree of life exist,"—
Nor could he from the thought desist;
"Albeit his magic lore was vast,
Still must he come to death at last.

He'd be the greatest wonder known
If he could make the tree his own,
And hold it subject to his end,
The destiny of earth to mend!"
Soon night a balmy fragrance spread—
He cared not yet to seek his bed;
Upon the stars he turned his gaze,
And on the clear moon's silver blaze;
Then mourned he, for his grief was sore,
"What bliss to live for evermore!"

Long thus he watched, what fairy power
Spoke to his soul in that sweet hour!
"Why was it with such jealous care
Was kept so hid this country fair?
And but that avarice did hear,
He ne'er had gained the monarch's ear!"
He felt more certain of the thing,
Some secret motive had the king;

Mayhap that none should ever see,
Save his own kin, the sacred tree,
To blossom only for their line,
Nor other eat its fruit divine!"
'Twas midnight when at length repose
Scarce hushed the wizard's dreamy woes;
He slept, but visions o'er him grew,
He saw in chase the friar crew,
To whom the sable path he owed
That led him to his new abode.
"Might not they still his steps arrest,
If guessed they what was in his breast?"
Next morn, o'er wold, and hill, and glen,
He wandered with the Indian men;
His new-born wish he never told,
But merely that he looked for gold.

But neither tree nor gold repaid
The careful scrutiny he made.

He only saw where, shaded dark,
High on a cliff a water mark,
When once in ages long past by,
A wrathful torrent rent the sky.
Tradition still preserved the tale,
Fraught with the houseless people's wail.
More the Indians could not say,
It chanced in times so far away!
Yet the omen helped the theme
Of the wizard's recent dream,
That upon the ground he trod
Where spoke mortal men with God.
His very musings made him fear,
Albeit he was a dauntless seer.
"What might not the peril be
Of his strange temerity,
If to earthly teaching blind,
He the secret would unbind,
How eternal life to win,
And erase our ancient sin!

Alas! to die were fate less dread,
Than the mystic search to thread!"

"Mayhap across some dismal lake,"
The thought alone did make him quake,
"Or in the depths of gloomy cave,
Silent as the fearful grave,
Grew fair the tree—
There, unredeemed by virtue still,
It coyed the reach of mortal will;
Oh, human frailty!"
Perchance the friendly Indians caught
Some glimpses of the wizard's thought,
As watched they with a curious gaze
How much their story did amaze;
But held their peace, nor let him know
They guessed the secret of his woe.
They showed him to the burial place,
Where slept the soulless of their race.

'Twas a spacious vault, I ween,
Dug beneath a rising green.
Lo! there recumbent ranks displayed
Fixed skeletons in paint arrayed,
Just as in life, to grace a fête,
Or for battle, armed in hate.
A lesson new he then did read—
He pondered o'er the Indian creed;
'Twas plain they hoped some future day
Would wake again the mute array!

And dance and sing, as erst they did,
And fight when to the onset bid.
"'Twas strange a ray so far could reach
Of tenets like the Christians teach."
The wizard was convinced once more
He dwelt where time commenced of yore,
When was the world rescued from night,
And from the dark sprang rosy light—

How little had he dreamt before,
To be so charmed on that new shore!
He hoped might ever prosper fair
The king who bade him travel there,
The only stranger that could boast
Invasion of the mystic coast!
Hark! came voices on the breeze—
To whisper seemed the fragrant trees,
"Yet might it be the song of bird;
'Save!' was the tuneful theme he heard.
Oh, was he knight, why not indeed?
To break some gloomy spell decreed!
Perchance the Prophet promised earth,
To seek the sum of mortal worth."
Say, was the wizard bold to blame,
Or would have reasoned you the same?

The very air, so sweet to breathe,
Seemed 'round his head a crown to wreathe;

His form appeared no more to weigh
Than the thin clouds of summer day,
And felt he e'en as he could rise,
Dissolved in essence to the skies—
Same as the soul that up will soar
When is our mortal race no more!
"Was it a trance, or was it true?
The scene around so fair and new!
The sable tide, the hills and sea
Between him and his own country!
There brought winter, want and fear;
Naught but joy and love was here.
Oh, what if he should find the key
To solve of life the mystery!"
Still his nervous form he felt
Into odors sweet to melt.
A fancy new, the wizard's soul
Bade his secret joy control;
He cared not yet to be a shade.
"Was he by the priests betrayed?

Sent by them, lest he should boast,
Perchance to the Elysian coast!"

E'en tho' the tree of life were there,
He would rather be elsewhere;
Yet little seemed that place the Hades,
Those smiling woods and sunlit glades;
Nor spectres were the forms around,
"Folly to think it airy ground!"
No ghosts the emerald hills so gay,
Truthful was their fair array;—
Tho' the sable river still
Mayhap bade his heart to thrill.
Soon the fancy wore away—
"Why mistrust the beauteous day!
Why the holy priests suppose
They his fortunes would oppose?"
He would not, while young and strong,
Leave the world he knew so long;

Nor each earthly joy resign,
In shadowy bliss to live and pine.
Another feeling o'er him came,
A cheering might was in his frame;
Each limb a mystic strength did thrill,
A vigor new his form did fill:
Nor spirits of the earth, nor air,
Had sought the sorcerer to dare!

Albeit he was but flesh and bone,
And of his race, I trow, alone,
Each moment more his courage grew—
Peace was around, the sky was blue.
His Indian friends, more gay than grave,
Could not with patience more behave.
He would of them remembrance bear,
When he should leave their realms so fair,
Tho' little guessed the wizard then
How he should return, or when.

Their wares the friars had extoll'd,
He felt most curious to behold;
For, up to then, his time had gone
In wandering with them alone;
And thought he, "Must in keeping be
Their genius with their rare country."
The Indians, with right good will,
Displayed him all their native skill.
'Twas worth a voyage to their shore,
To see their varied, tasteful store.
How they learnt to work so well,
Was more than could the wizard tell!
He bought a crown of feathers rare,
As toy least cumbersome to bear.

No gold had yet the wizard found,
Albeit he searched the land around;
And tho' his hours passed so well,
'Twas loss of time there more to dwell.

Yet was not fragrant less the air,
Less soft the sun, the hills less fair,
But all monotony to him,
Who still would follow up his whim,
And laugh at native ignorance, too,
That of the ore so little knew.
Yet was it pain to leave that shore
Nor know what luck he had in store;
If he chose further on to stray,
He might perchance e'en lose his way.
Thoughts chased each other in his breast,
He grieved to leave a place so blest;
Nor even gold, he must confess,
Could ever make him love it less.
"Mayhap the holy friars meant
When he got there he should repent,
And give up all his dreamy aim,
On gold to build his future fame."
More pleasant it was there to bide
Than drift on Fortune's changing tide!

But is adventure's charm too strong,
Bold youth cannot withstand it long.
Indeed the Indians could not fail
To see that aught his mind did ail,
And would of him the motive crave
Why his manner late so grave.
"If he would hunt with them," they said,
"'Twould drive the dullness from his head."
The wizard could conceal no more
What erst he told the priests before,
And must to them the truth confess,
The wish for gold was his distress;
And since he had not found it there,
He still would look for it elsewhere.
The Indians could scarce divine
So light a cause could make him pine,
And like the friars late before,
To lose their guest did much deplore,
And warned him 'twould be all in vain,
His search would only end in pain.

"Mayhap at the dark river's end
Might better luck his guest attend;
But who the warlike tribe would dare
Of women, who abided there?"

The wizard heard,—joy and surprise
Darkened the color of his eyes.
"A tribe of women! oh, how new!
Could the tale indeed be true?"
Nor yet in all his road before
Had ever wonder charmed him more.
He would the novel race behold,
Nor shun them tho' they might be bold.
"Ere he reached their mystic bower,
Long must drag each anxious hour.
Why not at once go on his way,
And homage to the fair ones pay?"
He pondered o'er the theme all day,
Nor night could drive the dream away.

"The new adventure must excel
All his fancy could foretell."
Then mused he, "Female kind are vain,
Like these, they do not gold disdain,
But love their persons to array,—
Perchance rich ornaments have they.
When loved not jewelry a maid?
Be sure my quest they'll freely aid.
My jealous hosts would keep me here;
But why should I a woman fear?"

The Indians bade him think once more,
Ere he left their peaceful shore.
"'Twas not wise, alas!" they said,
"Be his rashness on his head!
Never yet the women's ire
Soothed had song or tuneful lyre;
Token none, to love akin,
E'er did mortal from them win.

Hate their cruel hearts did fill,
'Twas their only joy to kill.
Where was lost the sable tide
In a mightier river wide,
In a forest's deepest maze,
Hid they from the stranger's gaze.
Their strength excels man's lordly gift,
In the wood was none so swift;
Grace knit their limbs—illusive show!
Death was in their bended bow.
Who might break the fearful spell!
Who the sylvan furies quell?
Enough the wizard had gone through,
Why expose his life anew?
It were hard, despite the past,
To die by woman's hand at last!"

The tale seemed true, the wizard paled,
Perchance his mighty spirit failed,—

Awhile he shrank from his intent,
And all his listening reason lent.
Why should his hosts still bid him stay,
If was not danger in his way?
Remembrance of their kindness past,
An instant held his purpose fast.
But no—shame hastened to his aid,
Who dare think he was afraid?
He would the evil women brave,—
Victory or an honest grave!
The Indians saw their counsel lost;
Away he must at any cost.
The paddlers rigged again the boat,
Upon the sable tide to float,
But cautioned him they must come back
Ere they reached the women's track,
And let him find his way alone;
God speed him to their secret zone!
The friars never would consent
To trust their launch on such a bent,

Nor they, I wis, though strong and bold,
Would face the demon's lurking hold!

Once more upon the river dark,
Sailed down the wizard's Indian bark.
Thro' sweet perfumes from shore and shore,
Again the swarthy paddlers bore.
Two days they toiled, when on the third
A distant beating surge was heard.
This was the mightier stream, foretold,
Wherein the sable river roll'd.
The paddlers steered the boat to land,
And grounded it upon the sand.
Now must they climb near by the shore,
A verdant hill that high did soar;
Nor lagged the wizard on the way—
He loved such tasks as well as they.
Each moment more his longing grew,
The new and wondrous stream to view.

And when they reached the mountain's height,
The mighty river bore in sight.
Thus was the wizard's wish repaid—
He gazed beneath a tree's thick shade;
Ah me! till then did never man
Such breadth of waters ever scan.
The river was indeed so wide,
He could not see the other side.

The spreading waves with white were tipp'd,
As swift the rushing current tripp'd,—
He passed his hand before his eyes,
The boatmen smiled at his surprise,
But soon they had to marvel too.
A brazen glass the wizard drew,
He peered, and saw the further shore,
Which told him 'twas a stream no more.
Perchance he almost thought at first
It was a sea that on him burst,

Then turning to his guides, quoth he,
"I pray ye look as well as me."
A lesson new they thus did learn—
To laugh it was the wizard's turn.
Oh, science is a magic thing—
'Tis better to be wise than king.
The little tube played well its role,
The Indians could not look more droll,
As viewed they o'er the river wide
Rise peaks beyond the plashy tide.
"Oft have we climbed the hill," said they,
"And watched those waters like a bay,
But never till to-day did dream
To gaze across the mighty stream,
Nor could we for an instant guess
The distance might be ever less!"

Their trust at once the wizard won,
Who before such things had done?

Fortune ever aids the brave—
Heaven the venturous stranger save!
The paddlers showed him far away
Where the women's haunt did lay.
First must he go along the shore,
He had a dreary way before,—
Then turn towards where the sun declined,
He must perforce the dark wood find.
Still paled they, as they strove by sign
To mark his crooked journey's line.
"Whate'er his power, ah, forbear!"
Again their look did say "beware!"
But the wizard took no heed,
He had faith above their creed.
Adown he bade them lead the way,
List he would not to more delay.
At the hill's foot he left his guides
And sought his path with eager strides,
While they their boat shoved off from shore,
And backward turned its prow once more.

They watched him till the winding tide
At last his agile form did hide.

The wizard travelled all that day,
Thro' mud he toiled till eve was gray.
Hope bore him on, he had no fear,
Tho' naught he saw around to cheer.
At times, indeed, he had to wade,
For water-reeds his path waylaid.
Thus coasted he the sable stream,
And flitted like a passing dream.
At night his bed was on the ground,
While kept his jaguars watch around.
Next morn ere yet the rising day
Had pictured well his lonely way,
He viewed the greater current's shore,
That from the hill he saw before.
Oh, what envious thoughts were thine,
When thou didst reach the river's line!

Nor had, I trow, a white man e'er
The peril broke, that led thee there.
Far down the broad and moving stream
The merging saffron sun did beam,
Fit crown of rays the tide to grace;
It seemed the titan river's face,
As tho' just waking from his sleep,
He would upon the stranger peep!

What victims had he not, I trow,
Remorseless swallowed up ere now!
Yet watched serene the wizard bold,
As on the giant body roll'd.
E'en then a huge uprooted tree,
Whirled by the current down did flee,
And higher up the stream he saw
Two more the angry waves did draw,
Lords of the forest beaten low,
To feed the greedy monster's flow.

"And I am here!" the wanderer smiled,
The prospect wild his soul beguiled;
The while 'twas music on his ear,
The river's moaning voice to hear.
"Alas!" thought he, "how poor is art,
What picture ever may impart
Of this an image true!
Yet even will I try my best."
He took a pencil from his vest,
And quickly sketched the view.
"'Tis something for my friends to see,
When of my luck they question me,
If ever home get I.
Yet even then I do conceive
They scarcely ever will believe
This paper doth not lie."

His task achieved, he thought once more
On the dark way he had before,
E'en as the paddlers had him taught,
And to the west his pathway sought.

Awhile he skirted the broad tide,
Then entered on a prairie wide,
At whose far end the forest lay,
Where held the women tribe their sway.
The dreadful sun poured down his heat,
The wizard walked with weary feet,
Albeit he was so brave,
The while he gazed with longing view,
Where distant still the woodland grew,
That leafy freshness gave,
He would, I wis, its shadow gain.
Thus trudged he on despite of pain,
Nor thought he once of fear,
And 'twas a comfort to his soul,
When he had won his sylvan goal,
And knew his fate was near.
Pride, joy and hope were in his mind,
It was a fairy place to find,—
The lofty trees bent to the wind,
And all around did cheer!

A brooklet further on did flow,
With silver wave and murmur low,
And flowers on its banks did grow,
That sweet did make the air.
He listened to its whispering sound,
As on it plashed with tiny bound,
It seemed an omen fair.
"Fair realms indeed these women hold,
Here would I e'en myself grow old,
Nor covet more," thought he.
"These spreading branches parry well
Fierce Phœbus, who my soul would quell,
And seek to hinder me.
Here would I build a house to bide,
My jaguars always by my side,
How pleasant life would be!"
Nor gold nor women filled his brain
As mused the wizard in this strain;
His trials past, a weary train,
Came only in his dream,

Might none invade his quiet cot;
But with repose were soon, I wot,
Those passing fancies all forgot,
And vagaries did seem.

He bathed him in the plashy wave,
That to his limbs a freshness gave—
His jaguars caught a deer.
A fire made the wizard soon—
Sweet venison is a tempting boon
To peasant or to seer.
As 'neath the rustling leaves he sat,
He never ate a meal like that,
I wis, for many a year.
Yet there within the ancient wood,
Ere tasted he the sylvan food,
He crossed himself and prayed,
And when was finished his repast,
A fond look on his beasts he cast—
His ever trusted aid.

He felt what might was his indeed,
He chafed upon the quest to speed,
The virgins to subdue.
Tho' still untamed those nymphs so fell,
He who could a jaguar quell,
Why fear a maid to sue?
He doubted not that they were fair,
Indeed the Indians said they were,
Albeit unloving too.

Yet still the wizard's only theme
Was gold; he had no other dream,
In seeking the fair dames.
He cared not for their beauty wild,
Or in what class they might be styled,
Or if they had rare names.
Till then no tokens had he seen
Of them within the woodland green,
Nor could he guess the space between
Him and their lurking place.

Yet must he for the search prepare,
Nor longer dally idly there,
But hurry on their trace.
Still to the west he pressed his way,
The forest deep excluded day;
With airy step the wizard sped
The hidden track his jaguars led,
Through brier and through cane.
Awhile he paused where flowers blew,
He seemed to have a fancy new,
And lit a fire again.
He burnt some incense on the ground,
The flowers mingled scents around,
That did the wind enchain.

Once more he followed up his road,
His lightened step new power showed,
As he the maze did thread.
No Indian hunter of the wood
More patiently the chase had stood,
Though to such pastime bred.

No noise the silence there did wake,
Save a dead branch his foot might break
In the tangled green,
And some lone dove would softly coo,
Hid where the deepest foliage grew,
Nor let itself be seen.
At last he reached an open space,
That thicker trees around did grace,
Yet so their boughs did blend on high,
Their shade did still conceal the sky—
Sweet zephyrs bided there.
It was a place for elves to play,
Or dance to music's tuneful sway,
Or comb their scented hair.
The wizard's dreamy heart was gay,
He knew no spot so fair.

It was a bonny place to rest,
Albeit an uninvited guest;
The velvet sod the wizard prest,
And took a brief repose.

Though yet fatigued he little knew
'Twas more the bulky trees to view,
That seemed to rise in rows.
The wizard mused, he fain would know
When the trees commenced to grow;
Mayhap coeval with the earth
Was their mystic fairy birth,
Perchance to Eden they lent grace,
Who the secret truth might trace?
A forest is a wondrous page;
Who hath not envied oaks their age,
Or dragon trees, or chestnuts vast,
O'er which a thousand years have passed?
Again upon the wizard stole
The thought that teased his secret soul:
Was it a fever of his brain,
Or might the tree of life remain?
The tale about the women, too,
Was strange, if it indeed was true.
Young were the tribe, the Indians said,
Yet in no time had ever wed.

"Were they immortal? Sole thus, I trow,
Had they retained their youth till now;
Or did they hold some secret charm,
To parry off each earthly harm?
How beautiful!" He fain would view
At once the fearless virgin crew.
He called his jaguars to his side
And through the wood again did glide.
But hark! tho' distant was the sound,
A laughter broke the still around;
Nor shrill the voices, yet 'twas clear,
The issue of his fate was near.
He held his breath, the laughter still
Sent through his heart a warning thrill.
The wizard had nor shield nor spear,
As on the Sibyls he would peer.
That they were women it was plain,
He heard the voices once again.
With step more noiseless than before,
On toward the merry sound he bore.

The open aisle he did evade,
For prudence every caution bade,
And ever kept behind a tree,
Unseen he would the damsels see.

But that was brave the wizard's soul,
Never had he reached the goal.
A denser grove grew on before
That helped his curious aim the more.
He heard the laughter now so near,
'Twas certain that the chase was here.
Between two boughs he sent his gaze,
There bathed a band of black-eyed fays;
While others on the grass reclined,
And some their glossy hair did bind.
Bows and arrows were around,
Lying on the meady ground.
Oh! maiden's undecked form is fair,
What grace and loveliness were there!
A wreath of softened light divine
Seemed 'round their slender zones to shine.

Still wore they all a vestment chaste,
That fell from just below the waist,
And scarcely reached their thighs.
Their virgin breasts, so round the pair,
Ah me, so hard, like snowballs were,
And twins alike in size.
Their well shaped heads were faultless all,
Their stature feminine, tho' tall.

It was a silent, limpid brook,
Wherein the maidens pleasure took.
They laughed and plashed each other o'er,
And chatted with the ones on shore.
Just then one jaguar grim did sneeze,
A virgin eyed him through the trees.
An instant's thought, an arrow flew,
How quick the deed! the aim how true!
The stricken beast lay low and prone,
The wizard heard his plaintive moan.
Startled, he hurried to the place,
And all the sylvan band did face.

The damsels paled; what vision new
Upon their dazzled senses grew,
In that dark forest shade?
The wizard was so fair and bright,
They took him for a ray of light
From glittering Phœbus strayed!
Oh, woman, drop thy peerless eyes!
E'en thus in Eden did surprise
Sweet Eve, the moon's fair glow.
With pity mingled their amaze,
Where lay the jaguar they did gaze,
And wailed in meaning show!

But did the wizard not upbraid;
Spake he, "I pray ye lend me aid,
An erring hunter I."
While triumph lit his comely brow,
His secret awe he must avow.
"I need the jaguar well," he said,
"With me the chase it oft hath led;
I would not have it die."

To cure the beast the maids essayed ;
Nor was the moment long delayed,
The patient to restore.
The feathered shaft they quickly drew,
Their simple antidotes were true,
And lived the brute once more.
Oh, rare and mystic doctor's skill!
Nor did their fatal power to kill
Excel their healing lore.
Scarce was the jaguar's hurt allayed,
Around the damsels fair it played,
And all its joy would say,
As petted greyhound, graceful, tame,
The favorite of high-born dame,
Will round its mistress play.
The other jaguar crouched sedate,
While cared the virgins for its mate;
Nor anger showed, nor love, nor hate,
Nor moved from where it lay.

What mortal man had never done,
The wizard had achieved and won,
Spite the story he was told,
Where the sable river roll'd.
Where, enchantment, is thy power?
He had gained the fatal bower;
Oh, Fame, his prowess tell!
Hero none of fairy land,
Deed so great had ever plann'd,
And was alive and well!
Marvelled had the Indians then,
Had they seen their guest again
In such company,
Mingling with the warrior band,
Walking with them hand in hand,
Unscathed and free.
The virgins—how traduced they were—
Bade the wizard banish care,
Nor other than a hunter bold,
Roving wood and vale and wold,
They guessed was he,

Tho' perchance they fain would know
Where he came from, where would go,
Over hill and lea.

I trow the wizard wished as well
The maids their origin would tell,
If they perchance did know.
Was it Minerva and her band,
From heaven come to this new land?
It might indeed be so.
But then fair Pallas' eyes were blue,
Save that the earth had changed their hue;
Or wore disguise the martial maid,
Her bright divinity to shade?
Who could the mystery tell?
What mattered it? the maids were fair,
Were they of earth, of sea or air —
That secret there did dwell,
Nor recked the wizard why they chose
To think the other sex their foes.

He was content such was their fate,
Without a male to share their state,
Happy, blithe and free.
They led him through the ancient wood,
They showed him where their hamlets stood.
Deep leafy shade made cool the air,
Fruits of every kind were there,
And many a scented tree.

No houses had the damsels fair;
They lived in floral arbors rare,
That laughed at sun and shower.
Sweet vines o'er each grew interlaced,
That roof and sides as well embraced,
And made a natural bower.
Where was he? Who were they
Of whom naught history did say?
And but for the Indians' tale,
Never had he drawn the veil
That gave them to his view.

A thrill was in the wizard's brain;
Why indeed his wonder feign,
So unforeseen and new!
Each young dame so bright and fair,
What a sisterhood were there!
In seclusion deep and lone,
Where the sunlight scarcely shone,
Yet so daring too!
Wild pig, before their guest they laid,
Fresh from the arrow of a maid,
That hunted late before.
Herself, the keen Diana chaste,
Its morsels for the wizard's taste
With careful fingers tore.

The bathers their light dresses changed,
All in a row around they ranged,
Nor was less fair their guise.
Circlets graced their silken hair,
Of parrots' plumes of beauty rare,
And bright and varied dyes.

A skirt of fringes, too, they wore,
Of hues the humming-bird once bore,
Like gossamer or down.
It left the knee and leg disclosed,
The fairy bust was all exposed—
It was a scanty gown!
No shoe their tiny feet compressed,
Yet sandals half their beauty dressed,
Tied on with cords of blue.
A simple taste indeed did show
Their sylvan garb from top to toe,
And spoke them modest, too.
Had thought the wizard which to name
Of all the maids the fairest dame,
He never had it done;
Each one a separate charm possessed,
To choose it had his soul distressed—
He could not single one.

Troop upon troop from further west
Came to mingle with the rest—

Who had counted the wild band
As guardians of their mystic land,
They sat with bow and quiver!
The selfsame type by all was held,
Like those the wizard first beheld
When dallying in the river.
These were the warrior virgins dread,
With whose exploits the Indians fed
E'en late the wizard's ears.
How turned indeed the tables were,
As sat the merry wizard there,
Laughing at his fears!
Startling was the picture then,
Who had read the like, and when,
In legend or in song?
The spotted jaguars both lay near,
Gentle as two timid deer,
Before the warrior throng.
That sylvan home to keep and save,
'Twas well its champions were brave,
Nor faint of heart or old,

Nor others could deserve so well
In joy to wander there and dwell
Like they, the bright and bold.

New fancies in the wizard's brain
Still conjured up the sylvan train,
And filled him with a strange delight,
Though awe was mingled with the sight.
Sweet cinnamon was in the air,
And citron blossoms opened there,
And saw the wizard a huge stone,
From whose recesses came a tone,
Like sweetest music to the ear,
That charmed his wandering soul to hear.
"How little," mused the wizard then,
"This fairy world is known to men.
Oh, happy day that I did roam—
What will the people say at home
When I my ventures do unfold,
Albeit I carry back no gold!"

Bright Turkish tales he did recall,
Might not the maids be houries all;
And this Mahomet's heaven rare,
Where was no trouble, toil or care?
But no! the Koran did not tell
The maids were armed that there did dwell,
And these used weapons with a grace
That spoke them well no holy race.

"Ah!" thought the wizard in distress,
"What mighty secrets must I guess?
Who the riddle may explain,
Why from yon rock that music's strain?
The warrior maidens cannot tell,
I vow myself at fault as well.
Might tumbling waters be the cause,
Prating within by mystic laws;
Or singing winds imprisoned there?
It was indeed a witching air,
Nor mortal music it did seem;
'Twas more like an unearthly dream."

While thus he raved, the virgin throng
Peered on his agile figure strong.
Not such, I wis, the forest's maze
Had ever braved to meet their gaze.
His awe as well did make them smile,
And much the damsels did beguile.
Flattered they seemed to see him, too,
Though chance had sent him to their view;
For never had the wizard told
He traced them to their secret hold.
Yet love did picture not their gaze,
'Twas only that he did amaze.

Well indeed he might feel pride
To rest by those fair maidens' side,
Or walk with them among the trees,
While balmy blew the scented breeze.
If sat he 'neath the genial shade,
The sweetest drinks for him they made,
Of juices which, with native tact,
From rarest fruits they did extract.

Wild flowers, too, for him they sought,
His pleasure was their only thought.
Of beauty rare were some and new,
And filled with gentle perfumes, too;
And oft it did his soul amuse
To see them their keen arrows use.
'Twas fair to view their maiden art
Bring down the boar or rapid hart,
Or if he chose, they could as well
Make on the birds their arrows tell.
Never life had seemed so sweet
Till he the woodland dames did meet.
No more he cared for golden ore,
That was his cherished theme before.
He thought of the fair maids alone,
Their power and the tuneful stone.

One morn among the woodland shades
Far he wandered with the maids;
He doubted still at all he saw,
So much above all earthly law.

'Twas ecstasy to feel the air
That breathed around the flowers there,
Nor ravished less the damsels' gaze
That helped him through the forest's maze.
Their fairy forms were bright to see,
Their merry laugh was full of glee;
Their ready bows were in their hand,
As flitted on the lovely band.
The wizard's jaguars kept their place
Near their master's side;
The red deer flew before their trace
And wide away did hide;
But were the virgins not that day
Bent upon the chase,
And safe from harm their wonted prey
Fled on in needless race.
The maidens through the wood did wend,
In the genial shade,
Nor cared the wizard when would end
The sylvan promenade.

At last they reached the river broad,
That late before the wizard awed
Ere he the maids had met,
And tied was there a long canoe,
With figures carved and fair to view,
And all with flowers set.
Though midway in the titan tide
Fast the bounding current hied,
'Twas smooth near by the shore.
Then quick embarked each sylvan dame—
They bade the wizard do the same,
And up the stream they bore.
Six maidens paddled on the bark,
As neath the woodland shadows dark
It easily did steer.
As well they could its course impel
O'er the gentle river's swell,
As strike the bounding deer.
The wizard with amaze was dumb,
Around the joyous birds did hum,
And spray dashed from the prow.

His fairy sailors tired not
As passed they cave, and bay, and grot,
Nor sweat was on their brow.

The dreamy air was sweet, divine—
The bright sun on the stream did shine;
It was a lovely sail;
The very wind had hushed, to view
The rapid bark as on they flew,
Nor needed they a gale.
Oh, queen of rivers! 'twas delight
To gaze once more upon its might,
And think upon the martial band
That kept its mazy scented strand.
When he viewed the scene before
From the sable river's shore,
It seemed to him less fair.
Was it that the maiden crew
Bade a charm invest it new?
Magic whispered there.

Grim crocodiles in playful guise
From the deep would raise their eyes
And widely ope their wondrous jaws,
Perchance to speak their mute applause.
Once a jaguar on the shore
A stricken fawn before them tore,
While vultures scarce would let him eat,
They craved a portion of the meat.
Twice at the hungry birds he flew,
Then turned to tear his prey anew,
Till so at last they pressed him sore,
Far in the woods his prize he bore.

Still on did speed the fairy bark;
The woodland shore was like a park.
There herds of deer did sweetly graze;
They stopped upon the boat to gaze,
Nor turned to flee in silly fear,
Albeit the rowers were so near.
Oft logs did drift upon the stream,
Like such mayhap the craft did seem.

Other creatures browsed as well,
Whose kind the wizard could not tell,
With wondrous snouts, and ran away
If lion chanced to come that way.
And once they passed a bright cascade
Tumbling through the sylvan shade.
How cool it looked, as dashed in spray,
It murmured on its foamy way.
Yellow snakes with sparkling eye,
The little birds around would shy,
Yet from their covert where they flew,
The serpents' dazzling coil would view,
And sing, though tremulous and low,
While mutely watched the wary foe,
Till some less cautious or less fast
Would be the reptile's prey at last.

What war of animals! 'twas rare
To see it as was pictured there.
Enough there was to interest,
Or strike with fear a craven breast;

Yet never paled our rover brave,
Albeit his bonny eye was grave.
Six other maids who, as relay,
Sat while the dreamy bark made way,
Now took the paddlers' place,
Who, in their turn, perchance would rest
Their sunny cheeks sweet roses blest,
How pretty was each face!
Again the airy boat did speed,
By verdant hill, and wold, and mead,
Nor ever once did reel,
Nor to the right nor left did sway,
As urged it on the dryads gay,
But kept an even keel.
The wizard felt how sweet the spell,
I trow he honored beauty well,
As on the nymphs he peered,
The while, fair mirrored in the stream,
He saw their shadowy figures beam,
And e'en his curly beard.

Bright Phœbus climbed his midday throne,
What space the light canoe had flown,
The wizard knew not aught;
So smoothly glided on the bark,
The fleeting, careless hours to mark
Had been but idle thought.
Soon, as they bore, a warrior maid,
Fair like the rest, in plumes arrayed,
They saw not far before.
It was repose once more to view
A mortal being, so gentle too,
Along that sylvan shore,
Where wrangled cruel beasts all day,
Yet knew and feared the virgins' sway,
That hunted in the wood.
Surprise and pleasure and amaze
Half dimmed the wizard's eager gaze,
As scarce believe he could.
Around her hair sweet zephyrs wreathed;
Music in all her figure breathed,
As there alone she stood.

She waited for the roving band,
And beckoned with her tiny hand,
Like any damsel would.

Still the bounding river roars,
High aloft the condor soars,
Lovely creepers all around
In the giant foliage wound,
But naught the wizard saw.
He had neither eyes nor ears,
Nothing thrills him, awes or cheers,
All was blank except the maid
Standing in the river shade,
Fairer than the law.
Soon was nigh the light canoe;
Landed all the virgin crew,
The wizard with the rest.
Him and his grim jaguar aid
Welcome gave the river maid,
With courtesy the best.

"Come with me," the maiden said;
Through the wood a pathway led—
Fallen leaves sweet fragrance shed,
As precedence took she.
They walked as on a scented floor,
The massy stream they scarce heard more,
As behind the mighty shore
From their steps did flee.
Where goes the wizard and that train?
I trow sweet fancies lull'd his brain
As in the midst he walked,
And felt the drowsy forest air,
Soft as the hour of vesper prayer,
And with the virgins talked.
Their paddle late was still his theme,
The fairy yacht, the monster stream,
And marvels of the shore.
Were house and kindred all forgot?
I wis their absence grieved him not,
He thought of them no more.

" He who for fair wisdom sighs,
Why the traveller's toil despise?
What know ye, who stay at home,
Of the joys of those who roam?
Leave your pleasures, books and friends,
Fame the wanderer attends."
Albeit the wizard's look was young,
Half a century o'er him hung,
Nor had he thrown away his time,
As erst hath told this faithful rhyme;
Still these last days a charm possessed,
He vowed they were his travels best.

Heavier trees they quickly meet,
Like those the wizard erst did greet
Near by the virgins' home.
Like those their branches mingled so,
Arching to a lofty bow—
It made a fairy dome.

It was a place for nymphs to lurk—
A band of maidens there did work
Hollowing a canoe.
A part they seemed in dress and face
Of the martial virgin race,
And quivers wore they, too.
The timber echoed to their blows,
Skilful artisans were those;
Where they learnt the trade, who knows?
Keen as could the best shipwright,
Drove the maids their axes bright,
Nor fire deigned to use;
Though 'tis the fashion, it is said,
With other races forest bred,
Who make their own canoes.
By turns the wizard smiled and paled,
A weaker man, perchance, had quailed,
Or taken to his heel.
Albeit their implements were flint,
The virgins cut as deep a dint
As had an axe of steel.

Oh, lucky wizard! that to thee
Vouchsafed was such a thing to see!
In future times the tale to tell,
Yet doubt if he saw truly well;
Or was it dream or fairy spell
Deluding his bewildered brain,
Startling as a fabled strain?
Nor who may say the tale doth read,
It was not fairy land indeed?
Yet, like the dazzled wizard, too,
He'll question if the story's true.
The maidens laughed as he appeared,
Nor e'en his gloomy jaguars feared;
And bade him take some light repose,
Where near their floral bowers rose,
E'en like the ones he saw before,
When erst he reached the virgins' door.
There, still he watched the damsels' toil,
He had not come their task to spoil,
But in a happy mood did gaze,
While sweetly showed the forest maze.

The falling axe came on his ear,
The sound was musical to hear.
Who had believed, that ne'er did view,
The power of the virgin crew?

This was the shipyard of the band;
All was strange in that new land.
With roasted nuts he was regaled,
Nor fruits nor sweetest viands failed.
Again he rambled through the shades
With a party of the maids,
And to attest his jaguars' skill,
A noble stag he bade them kill.
This, to the working virgins brave,
With humble grace the wizard gave.
He hoped their bark when all complete
Would add new beauty to their fleet.
At length, when near declining day,
He started on his homeward way,
His damsel crew did lead before,
They heard the cleaving axe no more.

They launched again their bright canoe,
And swiftly on the stream they flew.
The craft obeyed the current's will;
The maidens dipped their paddles still;
But it was more their yacht to guide,
Than to impel it down the tide.
I wis much faster were they borne
Than when they left that fairy morn.

The wizard rested all next day,
He cared not in the wood to stray.
The more he thought, he wondered more,
Was ever such a scene before,
As that nation of fair maids
Making bright the sylvan shades?
A legion seemed they, far and wide,
Peopling the river side.
How poor indeed the wizard's might,
If he would the damsels slight.

It was fearful, strange and grand,
To be among the maiden band!
Legends, stories, albeit rare,
Yield ye to the marvel there.
They seemed to have enough to do,
The wizard gazed with dreamy view.
With bright new strings their bows they graced,
Their ruffled arrows they replaced.
The virgins cooked upon their knees,
Oft they danced among the trees.
How light their forms, and graceful, too,
As circles on the green they drew.
Oh, had base tales defaced their state,
Or charmed them had the wizard's prate?

Each instant of the wizard's time
Seemed an elfin pantomime.
E'en like a poem sped his life,
No trouble there, or wicked strife.

No jealous feelings warped the band;
As sisters walked they hand in hand.
They each their occupation knew,
And kept a cheerful order, too.
Some for the chase away did roam,
And some with the wizard stayed at home.
Games had they, too, the wizard yet
Had much to see and ne'er forget.
I trow were jovial maidens they,
Perchance less fond of war than play.
Once in a race they flew away,
Through the thin wood they held their way,
Where so the giant trees did grow,
They left a lane between each row.
More than a mile the damsels sped,
Then turned and laughed the one who led.
Bright as the Iris was each dame,
As on the fairy runners came.
How round their arms, their legs how fair;
How beautiful their streaming hair!

The wizard sighed, what toil before,
If still he sought the golden ore.
How much more joy was there around
The virgins' prate, the scented ground.
Oh, he would ever linger there,
And with the maids the forest share.
What feeling was it on him stole,
Softened his look and stirred his soul?
But no! love fired not his brain,
He knew not such a silly chain.
Sole as a brother he would rove
With them the balmy sylvan grove,
And be their ally to defend,
Should foe to dare their joys pretend.
Yet little did they need his aid,
What stranger might their home invade
And not the outrage deeply rue?
No coward fear the virgins knew.
He alone, the wizard bold,
Had found asylum in their hold.

Again their guest to entertain,
Formed in a line a damsel train,
Did practise with a bow.
First shot her shaft the centre maid;
Three others on each side arrayed—
It was a goodly show.

Each in her turn her arrow flew,
The damsels' aim was quick and true—
An orange was the mark.
Full eighty paces off it shone,
One ripe and golden fruit alone,
Amid the green a spark.
How pretty showed each tiny foot,
As each her left one forward put,
And bent her trusty bow!
The winged dart sang through the air—
The keenest archer had blushed there
To see that winning row.

Each arrow in the mark did tell,
With the last shot the orange fell—
It kept the tree no more.
Too heavy was its load to bear,
The practised maidens shot so fair,
Each arrow pierced its core.
When taken up, oh, magic sight!
So in a ring the shafts did light,
A shuttlecock it seemed.
Nor, gentle reader, ever say,
When comest thou to learn my lay,
Perchance I only dreamed.

None had the riddle ever guessed
Which of the virgins shot the best.
All helped the fairy ring to draw,
Their smile reproved the wizard's awe.
"Oh, fie! His praise they did not need,
He had shot as well indeed,
If like they from time before
He had learnt the forest lore."

Still envy on his breast did lie,
As he their magic art did eye,
And visions that he did not say,
Recalled again the fatal day
When first the virgins charmed his view,
And one his jaguar nearly slew.
Then mused he, "What a troop to lead,
To aid a needy king indeed!
Man, or soldier, bred to war,
Hadst thou seen the like before?
Oh! are they maids, that brave array?
The Turk had felt his pride decay.
'Oh, my harem, palace, all,
Slaves my power doth enthrall,
Must I lose ye? Allah, oh!
Alas! too heavy is my woe!'"

What a lesson there to learn,
A Christian's zealous soul to burn!

Voted to celibacy the maids,
Their home was in the forest shades;
Ever like nuns, the maze to rove,
Making divine the sylvan grove.
What virtue his, the wizard bold,
Who seemed for naught to care but gold,
That thus the secret band could trace,
And look upon their haughty grace!
Thus, of old, Endymion stood,
Charmed by the huntress of the wood,
Queen of the forest, roving free,
'Twas a boon to gaze on thee,
Untaught alike to fear and love,
Yet beauteous as the sky above,
Walking in the fair moonlight,
Was she spirit of the night?
E'en so, the warrior maids were fair,
That scarcely known, held kingdom there;
Whom to reach was peril dread,
As the friendly Indians said;

Sole a heart unused to fear
Had made light the pathway drear.

Perchance Artemis was less chaste
Than those the dauntless wizard traced;
And they were brave and fair as she,
As paints her Grecian lore to thee.
Nor all her lover's secret joy,
To woo her and with her to toy,
Proud of his conquest of a dame
Whose purity had revered fame,
Ungentle, till with keen amaze
First beamed on him her bashful gaze,
When hushed was nature into sleep,
Had half the wizard's rapture deep.
So must renown the story tell,
How in the woods the maids did dwell,
And all the wizard's just surprise
To see they were so learned and wise.

Then mused the wanderer again,
"Fortune at times deals fair with men.
Had I not nerved me to the deed,
When had I seen these elves indeed!"
At intervals it was delight
To see them knit their vestments bright,
As 'neath the dreamy shade they sat,
And o'er their work did gayly chat.

Let not my story make thee doze;
Listen to the drama's close.
Reader, think not o'er this page,
Speak I of a fabled age.
Truth alone my rhyme hath sung,
Fairest wisdom, hold thy tongue!
How little of the earth is known,
As hardy travellers have shown.
Guerdons coy must it contain
For him who heeds not toil or pain.

Marvels yet mayhap do sleep,
Dark and fearful perils keep;
But as ages onward wheel,
Valor may undo the seal.
As the wizard bold looked back
On his past and dreary track—
Wilds traversed, and scorching plain,
E'en the icy, stormy main,
Ah, how cheap was all to win
A rest that magic wood within!
Shadows of his former days,
Years gone by—hopes, checks, delays,
All were naught in that fair hour,
In the virgins' mystic bower.

The time sped on—the breezes blew,
Fairest flowers daily grew.
The wizard and the warrior maids
Hunted through the groves and glades.

Once a lioness they found
Playing with her cubs around,
Straight in their path her eyeballs blazed,
In act to spring her form she raised.
Who will bid the savage stand?
Heaven defend the little band!
Lo! the jaguars have no fear,
Their master's ready word they hear,
One on each side they pin the foe,
The wild beast struggles in her woe,
Vain strife! her cries are shortly o'er,
She feeds her hungry cubs no more.
The virgins vowed 'twas bravely done,
Albeit the odds were two to one.
Their love the wizard won that day;
They hoped he might prolong his stay.
Not yet had spoken he of gold,
His cherished wish he would withhold,
His life so great a charm possessed,
Still with the maids he fain would rest.

He asked the question of the maids,
"Since when they dwelt in those fair shades,
Whence came they, and what secret cause
Bade them war on human laws?
Why sought they not the world," he said,
"And if they never cared to wed?"
The virgins stared, their color fled,
Or it by turns was pale and red,
Anger, sorrow, and surprise
Shot from out their lovely eyes.
"Alas," said they, "what dost thou ask?
'Twere vain our memory to task
What time hath passed since here we dwell,
The aged moon perchance might tell!
Whence came we it were hard to guess,
Journals none do we possess,
The mystery of our life and birth
Is a secret of the Earth.
Of men we nothing know; the few
Who seek us must their rashness rue.

To link with them our more free fate,
Would only be to lose our state;
Against their laws we do not war:
Pray thee, question us no more!"

The wizard hushed, he must confess
He had heard words of wisdom less,—
Darkness overcast his brain,
His thoughts he could no further strain,
As he gazed on each fair dame,
Say was not his knowledge tame!
Ye, who while the stars revolve
Would their hidden lore resolve,
Ye do not more surely rave,
Than the learned wizard grave.
He was bold, I trow, and wise,
Ere he saw the virgins' eyes.
Already he had felt their power,
It was more than woman's dower;

If they were immortal too,
What could all his powers do?
Gloomy doubts assailed his mind,
Would the damsels still be kind?
Awe his troubled soul did share,
Was it all an Elfin snare?
No arms apparently he wore,
The little mystic gun he bore,
Wood-like, seemed a weapon vain,
He used it as a walking cane.

The maidens asked him why so pale,
They hoped that naught his heart did ail.
Again their playful banter gay
Brought to his muse its waning ray,—
As yet no guile in them he knew,
And once again his courage grew,
To leave them surely would be pain,
Was ever such a courteous train!

Unlike, I trow, those fabled maids,
Bellerophon sentenced to the shades,
When victory reprieved his life,
Threatened by Proctus' spiteful wife,
Since Tobates would not fulfil
The mandate of her cruel will,
But with brave deeds his virtue tried,
Lest jealousy had him belied.
Gold was the wizard's only thought
When first the martial dames he sought,
And now e'en this he would forego,
To bide with them in weal and woe.
No word of his had yet express'd
The quest that lingered in his breast;
They guessed him but a hunter still,
As such they harbored him no ill.

Contented with his recent joys,
Dubious travel still he coys,
He let the damsels e'en conclude

He was a rover of the wood,
Like them the deer and boar to chase,
And all the fiercer sylvan race,
And on his fortune loved to dwell,
How he had broke the forest spell;
Whatever might the fates prepare,
He was glad to linger there.
When he his present state compared
With all the evils he had dared,
As sat he the green shade beneath,
While round the dryad troop did wreath,
Perchance he had not changed his lot,
To be at home in his own cot.
Man made the town,—the country He
Who life infused in magic tree,
And bade to flow the brooklet's wave,
And perfumes to the flowers gave,
That genial breezes caused to blow,
And painted heaven's azure glow—
How vain the fairest cities known,
To that sweet ancient thicket lone!

Naught but pleasure breathed around,
Music was in every sound,
Still hope the wizard's heart did fail,
As thought he on the virgins' tale.
He would like them immortal be,
Ever to rove the woodland free,—
He mused, "How weak is simple man,
How short of mortal life the span!
While these enjoy from times of yore
The boon to live forevermore!"
Perchance his eyes his envy spoke,
Suspicion in the maids awoke,
Had they fancied him till then
Free from debt of earthly men?
Like them ne'er fated to be old;
One of more than human mould,
Come with them their home to share,
In the mystic forest fair?
Mayhap the dream had filled their soul,
He might with them the Earth control.

The fairy phantom all was o'er,
He was a mortal man no more!
Then changed the spirit of their muse,
And pale was every fair recluse.

Oh, was he false? (alas 'twas pain,)
The first who could their friendship gain!
When one our favor hath received,
How cruel to be undeceived!
Their trust the wizard they had given,
And now their fairy hopes seemed riven!
Yet hesitated still each Fay
Their wondering troubled thoughts to say,
And sealed their lips with prudence wise,
Lest all too soon they did surmise,
Still was the sweet illusion broke,
Perchance they late had nearly spoke,
The wizard could not fail to see
Was turned the damsels' wonted glee,

And looks they cast on him askance,
He liked not much their furtive glance,
His limbs half trembled in that hour,
Where was all his magic power?
The thought came on his mortal mind,
They had his frailty divined,
Oh, must he lose that lovely scene,
And be what he before had been,
A rover of the wood and wold,
Still in shadowy quest of gold?

What disappointment to his brain!
His newborn vision all was vain;
Less, I wis, did Adam grieve
When fain fair Eden he must leave,
For Eve at least with him would share
His exile from a place so fair,
Albeit it was a trying hour,
To lose for aye his happy bower,
He parted with no blooming maids,
Like those within these ancient shades.

Then mourned his fate the wizard bold
As from his eyes his fortune rolled,
"Alas! what folly bade me here!
Why not to warning lend an ear?
Perchance the elfin virgin crew
My ruin even now do brew,
Some cruel doom, mayhap, indeed,
For me already is decreed.
'Tis hard in loneliness to die,
Unpitied by a weeping eye!
Though brave my jaguars, what are they
Against that hostile proud array?
Nor what would chivalry of me say,
To need their aid in such a fray!"

More grave, I wis, his fancies grew,
Indeed he knew not what to do,—
He would not show a craven fear,
Unworthy of a doughty seer,

But braced his nerves as best he might,
Still he almost looked a sprite,—
Superior to all, I trow,
The warrior maids had seen till now,—
Or was his bearing, albeit fair,
The waning courage of despair,
Like the poor stag that stands at bay,
Yet knows he cannot win the day?
Ah, could he to a level rise
With the elfin maidens wise,
And bid adieu for evermore
To all his dreams of golden ore!
Then no more the world he'd rove,
But live within that mystic grove.
The thing was torture to his mind,
To lose the sylvan maidens kind;
Shame filled his soul, and doubt, dismay,
"How might e'en he steal away?"
He dreaded once again to hear
The virgins' laugh peal on his ear.

His fair companions edged away,
No more the wizard's heart was gay,—
Yet hostile thought they did not show,
To warn him it was time to go,
But only seemed a little less
To prize his winning, bold address,
And courted him no more.
So bright they ne'er before did look,
The change his soul could scarcely brook,
'Twas disappointment sore.
At the elfin band he peered,
With quiver each, and bow;
Naught his humbled spirit cheered,
Bitter was his woe.
They so kind until to-day!
Adieu, past fairy hours gay!
Ah, farewell, enchanted wood!
Troubled thus the wizard stood.
Lover who didst once confide,
Cruel 'tis to lose thy bride!

More the wizard grieved his lot;
To think he was so soon forgot;
When all he craved in those fair shades
Was friendship with the mystic maids.

Striven had he from day to day
With dealing just to thread his way,
And thought he had played well his game,
To crown his brows with future fame;
When all the story should be told
How he had won the damsels bold,
Unaided by angel or by charm,
Save the sole might of his single arm
Till then he never could have guessed
A maiden had his soul distressed.
Oh, fallen pride, where is thy boast?
Forsaken by the fairy host!
What subtle tale will now thou tell,
To hide thy failure, and farewell,

When friends do question thee, "What news?"
And list to hear thy travelled muse?
Then thought the wizard to himself,
"How happy had I been an elf!
Alas! my fate is hard to bear,
The maidens mock at me, I swear!
Unfortunate! who hast indeed
Seen things beyond thy mortal creed,
And not added to thy power,
Wherefore seek the wood-nymphs' bower?

Yet o'er his dreamy muse must still
The vision come, his soul did fill,
What kept from death the youthful clan,
Superior to earthly man,
Yet living in the wood mundane,
Unsharing it with loving swain,
And laughing at the rest of men,
In rosy thicket and in glen?

Though he was no holy sage,
He knew well the Bible's page.
"If the deluge, in its spite
When it swept fair Eden's site,
Failed the tree of life to spoil,
Find it might another soil,—
Tho' the verdant stem was lost,
Here perchance a seed was toss'd,
Which did germinate, and grow,
Latent mid the forest show,—
A maiden happed its fruit to test,
And told the secret to the rest,
Hence these virgins' gift divine,
Would such fortune had been mine!
Oh, shall woman still defy
My knowledge of the earth and sky!

And bid me hush, nor wish to know
Whence their fairy tribe doth flow!"
The wizard rallied all his fear,
And sought again the maidens' ear,—

"Women or spirits! hold! I pray,
Tell me not to run away!
Call me neither vain, nor bold,
Though I be of mortal mould,
Answer yet my troubled strain,
Shake the darkness from my brain,
Say what spell is o'er your soul,
Son of earth cannot control!—
Is it fairy tree doth give
Your boon for evermore to live?
Such a one I have heard tell,
Once of old on earth did dwell."
The virgins listened in surprise,
Merry were their bright black eyes.
"Wondrous stranger!" answered they,
"Thou hast surely lost thy way;
Again we conjure thee be wise,
Think not we the truth disguise—
Magic tree like that you say
Grows not in our greenwood gay.

The forest 'round, thou well dost know,
All we did on thee bestow;
Yet, perchance, in times of old
Lived the tree thou seekest bold;
If still cumbers earth its shade,
Its virtue long ago did fade.
None in these fair realms have we,
That death could ever ward from thee.
Some fable, doubtless, hast thou read,
Take such fancies from thy head!
A sage, it suits not to believe,
Tales meant only to deceive—
Go follow fate, nor ever let
Our memory bring the vain regret,
But think of us, as on a dream,
That on thy sylvan joys did beam.
What wouldst thou have? Continue still
Thy journey over wood and hill.
A kind farewell we bid to thee,
Mayst thou ever happy be!"

Oh, silly man! who shrinks to find
A woman of superior mind!
Albeit bitter is the bowl,
Let envy not eat up thy soul!

He sat him on the meady earth,
Perchance like Job he cursed his birth;
His jaguars while did pass this scene,
Gazed wistfully with wandering mien,
Nor could they rightly understand
The power of the fairy land,
They only saw with much surprise
The weakness of their master wise,
He whom naught did daunt before,
Through howling wood and red men's roar,
Now vanquished by a maid!
Could it be their chief indeed,
Thus broken by a brittle reed,
Pale, quaking, and afraid!

The wizard roused him by their look,
Their mute appeal he could not brook,
"Dumb brutes!" thought he, "they cannot guess
The secret of my sore distress.
Their warning mood I will obey,
And bid the mystic maids good-day.
Why dally here, to gnaw the chain
Have wove on me the elfin train?
The tree of life they do affirm
Is not within their woodland term.

"Yet will I not my hope forbear,
That tree doth bloom on earth somewhere;
This fairy land so bright and new,
Still bids me think my presage true.
Here botany must mend its lore,
Abashed to see its leafy store
Of trees no earthly book doth name,
And flowers yet unknown to fame,

Each adding essence to the gale,
On hill, in woodland, and in vale;
And treasures coy, till now concealed,
To persevering toil may yield.
What boots it? tho' the tree do hide,
Gold yet may satisfy my pride."
Oh, dreamer! that a day before
Didst seek to live for evermore!
Will gold suffice to soothe thy care?
How transient is thy learned despair!
"Fair maids," said he, "now tell me true,
Ere I say my last adieu,
Is gold among thy precious store?
Through flood and wold I seek the ore—
Or can my weary steps ye guide
To where its glittering sheen doth bide?"

Then broke dark anger from the throng,
To mar the beauty of my song.

Confirmed was his ignoble birth,
He was a creature of the earth!
A fortune-hunter, nothing more!
All that their heart foretold before,
'Twas pain, alas! his comely face
Had lost its wonted princely grace;
And in his eyes the demon woe
Had struck the brightness of their glow,
How changed since when erst in the wood
He charmed their martial sisterhood!
As rose against him all their ire,
Fairer grew the virgins dire.
"What meanest thou? wouldst challenge still
The import of our maiden will?"
With one accord the wood-nymphs spoke,
The fury of their wrath was woke,
"Thinkest thou we harbor gold?
Or be to evil spirit sold?
Vain mortal man its aid may need,
We know not such a thing indeed—

Is this the tenor of thy aim ?
Weak wanderer, we say, for shame!"

Quick to their ready bows they flew,
Their rueful art the wizard knew,
But ere they fixed the fatal dart,
Remorse came o'er the virgins' heart,
And recollection all too strong
Stayed the frenzy of the throng.
Long had he bided with the maids,
And roved with them the stream and glades.
"To others be his blood to spill,
A single man," thought they, "why kill?"
'Twas not his fault, they still surmised
He had their latent band surprised,
When to the thicket first he came
And wondered at each fairy dame.
The wizard neither fled nor quailed,
Albeit his forlorn hope had failed;
Nor to defend himself did try,
Nor uttered unavailing cry,

But all impassive seemed to wait
The issue of impending fate.
As thus the maids their hand restrained,
His truant courage he regained,
And with a tranquil sigh he heard
Once more the wood-nymphs' softened word.

"Stranger, fly, we give thee time,
Free our souls from hasty crime,
Thou art fairer than the rest
Have their steps to us address'd,
We would save thee, go thy way,
Stay not here another day."
As thus they spoke the mystic crew
From the wizard's gaze withdrew,
Till far within the thicket wide
He saw the last fair maiden glide.
His patient jaguars' mute the while,
Watched too the martial band defile;

If nature had allowed them prate,
They had expressed more thanks than hate.
How like a dream! The damsels fair
Seemed to have vanished in the air,
Felt the wizard joy or fear?
Still their voice rang on his ear.
Spell-bound, listless, thus he stood
For a moment in the wood;
All was beauteous as before,
But he must not tarry more.
All was lost, his sordid quest
Was laughed at, threatened and unblest;
So of old did Satan fly
From the vengeance of the sky.

The play was o'er, the actors gone,
Not there the wizard bold may dawn,
Through trackless wilds he held his way,
His temper was no longer gay.

Yet to escape his heart was glad,
The Elves had almost made him mad.
His drink was in the fairest rill,
His food what might his jaguars kill,
Yet still he practiced with his gun,
Pigeons and turkeys failed there none,
I trow was ever good his fare,
Not oft had sportsman hunted there,
Except the Indian none indeed
Perchance that road did ever lead.
On every side the bounding game
Unconscious roved the forest tame,
And still blew fair the balmy breeze,
And grateful shade was 'neath the trees.
He knew not yet from day to day
Where might end his lonely way,
Oft he stopped as on he strode
To mark the ground upon his road,
And minerals broke lest they should hold
What he still sighed for, yellow gold!

He thanked his stars, as on he sped,
The virgins had not shot him dead;
'Twas something to have seen the band,
Nor died like others by their hand.
His thoughts as still he pushed his way,
Back to the fairy throng must stray;
The ancient wood rose to his view,
Where roved the mystic Elfin crew;
And then his conscience made him groan
He had so little prudence shown,
And all his fortune from him flung
Because he could not hold his tongue.
"Why had he nerved him to the task,
Questions unwise the maids to ask?
And all his avarice laid bare,
To make the simple wood-nymphs stare?"
How easily had left his grasp
The guerdon he had hoped to clasp;
Eternal life for all his care,
To wander with the damsels fair!

Now all his visions vanished were,
Changed to immaterial air,
Still must he on, nor lose his quest,
And keep hope ever in his breast.

It needed all a wizard's power
To ward despair in that blank hour,
Just when he had thought to find
The anxious object of his mind.
Alas! the *ignus fatuus* bright
Melted from his ravished sight,
When would it again renew
The pleasing fancies of his view?
Echo answered, "Ah, beware!
From the idle thought forbear!
Calm thy dreams and be consoled:
Spared have thee the maidens bold,
What wouldst more?" The wizard heard
Once more the virgins' warning word.

Then mused he, and the thought did vex,
"How fickle are the other sex!
Who in maidens' varying mind
Truth did ever hope to find!
To-day they greet with accents fair,
To-morrow of their frown beware!"
Up hill, down dale, the wizard sped,
Never more he turned his head,
Still his thoughts were with the band,
"Have I been in fairyland?"

The wizard journeyed night and day,
Until one morning's dawning ray
Showed beaming far a town;
As thus his view the vision blest,
Thought he, I'll have a little rest,
And on a stone sat down.
Shame mingled with his feeling still,
To curb the pleasure of his thrill,
As all intent he peered,

To tell the tale he did not dare,
His mishap with the virgins fair,
Or whence he now appeared.
The fairy legend of his way
Was all too strange for him to say,
Albeit within he laughed!
"Ah!" thought he, "I'll e'en again
To these good folks the hunter feign,
Else may they hold me daft."
As thus his plan he did compose,
Ere more the lovely morning rose,
He followed up his road,—
A jaguar grim on either side,
The wizard toward the town did glide,
That in the distance glowed.

Cornfields he saw the laborers till'd,
Or with new seed the meadow fill'd,
But never tarried he,

'Twere waste of time to dally there,
The goal to reach was all his care,
Beyond the spreading lea.
Soon was he near,—high o'er the town,
A single tower old looked down,
No moat begirt it round, or wall,
No sentinel the guard did call,
As to the gate he drew,—
Is none his mission there to crave,
Or welcome give to knight so brave,
Or challenge him if due?
Yet 'neath the porch half hid sat one,
Who but for very fright had run,
A toll-gatherer was he;
Perchance the statutes did not say
What toll a triad such should pay,
He was perplexed, Ah me!
Nor question put, nor signed salute,
But pale, and motionless, and mute,
He seemed a thing of wood.

The dreamy wizard passed, nor saw
The shade-like agent of the law,
And in the town he stood.

A while he paused, now what to do
I trow the wanderer little knew.
Some loungers in the thoroughfare
Looked on him with a wondering air,
And doubted if to stand or run,
He was, perchance, the Evil One!
"Stay!" cried the wizard, "do not flee,
I am a mortal man like ye.
It is not courteous or meet
Thus a stranger you should greet;
The sun did burn, the rain did pour,
With toil my weary feet are sore,
Good lack if reached I mountain cave,
To sleep upon the stony pave.
In search of game I lost my way,
This town I only saw to-day.

Here have I neither friends nor kin,
I pray you guide me to an inn!
My jaguars need not cause you fear,
Gentle are they as timid deer;
Yet ever ready to defend
Him whom I choose to call my friend,
Sole at my word they chase the prey,
I wis they better love to play."

His doleful story spoke he well,
His mighty strength he did not tell;
They heard, but hesitated still,
Feelings strange their hearts did thrill,
Albeit like the song of bird
Was the wizard's tuneful word.
Ere with him could parley they,
He must his escort send away,
It was not a natural thing
In a town wild beasts to bring.

The wizard readily complied,
He bade his jaguars move aside;
Then the idlers gathered near,
Honor paid they to the seer,
Like the sable friars late,
On him kindly did they wait.
"Pardon, Sir, we'll pilot thee,"
Said they, "an only inn have we;
Poor lodgings are they for your grace,
A learned wizard keeps the place,
One who hidden things doth know,
The wind at his command doth blow,
In foreign books he read his lore,
But never travelled from the shore."

"Nay! say you so?" the thing was new,
In this fair land a wizard too!
Here every wonder seems to bide,
Thought he, and once again he sighed.

Much he longed, I do aver,
To see his brother sorcerer;
And with him, studious and sage,
Ponder over earth's dark page.
"Oh! silly ye! I say again,
Who pine across the stormy main,
And think 'tis bliss in winter's ire
To warm yourselves before a fire!
What would ye give, the bright, the fair,
With me, this bonny land to share,
Here may the wanderer pluck at will
The fruits that bloom on every hill,
In orchards wild, of nature's own,
Untill'd the soil, the trees unsown,
With none to claim the golden wood,
Save the tuneful feathered brood;
Their kingdom this, for aye to roam,
Winter turns them not from home.
Fair reader, sympathize with me,
The laughing wizard says to thee."

Unlike the apples of favored lore,
No jealous Fays withheld the store;
Half bitter was the wizard's dream,
As changed the current of his theme,
And once again he called to view
The bright and happy Elfin crew,
Banning still their green domain
From the look of eye profane.
"Why the stranger's gaze forbid,
If no secret there was hid,
Which to find, oh, virtue rare!
Was to parry age and care?
And all the ills of mortal state,
The wicked's intrigue, the despot's hate,
Potent no more to cause us fear,
Or wring from us untimely tear.
And worse than these, the demon Want,
That e'en the boldest heart will daunt;
And mourning wail o'er brother's grave,
The young, the beautiful, the brave!

What gives the world, but to reclaim?
To-day is fortune and to-morrow shame
Of the bitter truth be sure,
Naught but sorrow doth endure.

Life is but a waking space,
Death the fleeting dream must chase;
How unreal that we were born
Only for a sunny morn!
See yon youthful maiden gay,
Swains around her homage pay—
Each his best to win her tries,
Joy is in her beauteous eyes.
Ah! how transient is her pride,
E'en the tomb her form will hide;
Yet 'twas sweet e'en for a while
To win that blissful region's smile.
As the wizard's fancy flew,
Once again his courage grew,

All his better genius rose,
To lull his spiteful, jealous woes.
"Better here to live an hour
Than to own a princely dower!
Seal the shades my raptured eye,
Still in fairyland I die!
Let the virgins keep the wood,
In their lonely sisterhood,
And immortal live for aye,
No such egotist am I."

Thus our vanquished hero tried
His envy of the nymphs to chide,
The townsmen led him to the inn,
'Twas solace to be safe within.
Nor stayed behind his petted guard,
They found asylum in the yard.
The landlord like a friend in need,
Quick to the wanderer did speed,

And gave to him his parlor best,
As suited to so brave a guest.
With window o'er a garden fair,
That ever blew a balmy air,
Beyond a chain of mountains high
Seemed to touch the azure sky.
One peak aspired o'er the rest,
Half lost in clouds its fairy crest;
Was it island in the air?
"Oh, for wings to take me there!
Or for ladder to ascend!
To what fortune might it tend?
Ah! what precious trees untold
Might their blossoms there unfold!
Fragrant with celestial dew,
Ever veiled to mortal view."

Still the hopeful wizard raved,
Though from peril he was saved;
He breakfasted and laid him down,
Nor at his humble couch did frown;

Albeit 'twas but a cot, and bare
(No mattress used the people there),
Sheets and pillow clean it had,
No more his weary heart was sad;
Thus as he lay the cooling air
Bade vanish memory and care.
Again with mortal men to be,
Gilded his quiet reverie—
"Oh, Turk, in ease and luxury read,
In oriental garden bred,
Why toying with thy hundred wives,
Wouldst laugh to scorn our homely lives?
Now listing to sweet fountains play,
Anon to music's soothing lay,
In soft and regal palace thou,
With abject slaves to fan thy brow,
And opium fumes to turn thy wrath,
Or revelling in scented bath,
Come hither, madman, and avow,
I am happier than thou!"

As thus the pensive wizard lay,
The landlord towards his door did stray,
'Twas open, and within he viewed
The wizard in his thoughtful mood.
Then spoke he briefly to his guest,
"I wish not to disturb thy rest,
But tell me if thou need'st aught
My inn affords, or can be bought;
I fear me, thou mayest still be weak,
If I can aid thee, pray thee speak!
If illness 'tis doth make thee faint,
E'en tell me what is thy complaint.
Specifics have I, potent, rare,
To work thy cure, or mystic prayer."
Our hero smiled, the mortal strain
Found echo in his quiet brain,
Then to his host he answer gave,
"Good sir, thy well-meant kindness save,
Nothing, friend, is there indeed
I really at this moment need.

Thanks to thy refreshing bed,
I am not weak at all," he said.
" Thy coffee too was good and fair,
The cup hath banished all my care.

" A lucky thing it was for me
I found so kind a friend in thee.
A day or two and I do leave,
My rest is but a short reprieve,
Yet counsel of thee, still, I pray,
To take me further on my way;
And, if I do not importune,
E'en would I crave of thee a boon.
Here people say, of secret lore
Thou dost possess a goodly store;
Some proof of this I would behold,
Nor think me curious or bold!
'Tis like a dream to hear again
The voice of educated men.

" Since wrestling through the weary waste,
None but the Indian have I traced,
Often more hostile than a friend,
And ever dangerous to offend.
Perchance I had not 'scaped the wold,
But that they feared my jaguars bold,
Or in my peril and alarm
'Twas God protected me from harm.
Ah me! the misty hunt e'en now
Brings pain and trouble to my brow."

" Dispel thy fear," mine host replied,
" Here will I be thy humble guide,
Not yet, I trow, in many a year
Hath guest so noble entered here,
And if I can thy time amuse,
My services I pray thee use!
Albeit with an unwonted fame
Have babblers wreathed my bashful name,
A simple amateur am I,
Incapable with thee to vie—

For if I venture may to guess,
No pedant do I now address,
But one, a gentleman and seer,
Whom fickle fate hath driven here.
Bide 'neath my roof, till sweet repose
Hath ended all thy weary woes;
Then with thy wonted strength amain,
Pursue thy sylvan sport again!
Canst think, infatuate, oh fie!
E'en yet to say to me good-bye?
So soon to follow up forlorn,
The chase thou even now dost mourn?
Uneasy is thy heart, oh pray,
Awhile thy dreary pastime stay!

"Let's have a walk—how cool the day—
Sweet Phœbus sheds a placid ray,
Till dinner-hour comes we'll stray,
And drive dull, heavy care away;

Thy tastes, I venture to divine,
Are kin and similar to mine.
Albeit arranged in hunter's dress,
Thou lovest other toil, I guess,
To ponder o'er the glassy brook,
And into nature's book to look,
Each latent secret to explore,
Invisible to vulgar lore.
Come then with me! e'en wilt thou see
Of Eden the forbidden tree,
A ruin of the olden time—
The soul of every poet's rhyme,
To teach us on earth's earliest page
A moral for the truly sage,
A league or more we fain must go,
To where its winning shade doth grow."
The wizard paled, but nothing said,
As down the stair his landlord led,
No word of his could give surmise
His thoughts were still of paradise.

They entered in a green park fair,
A growth of richest bloom was there,
"But 'tis not here," the landlord said,
"That tree its fragrance soft doth shed,
Sweet innocence beguiled of yore,
And many think is now no more,
Yet lives a token sure to all,
Of fairy Eden's cruel fall!
Be patient, and thy mind prepare,
Unbelieving thought forbear!"
As thus he spoke, a silver stream
Farther on their way did beam,
A bridge of rustic fashion rude
Made the watery passage good;
But ere they reached its sandy shore,
Sudden was there a rushing roar,
From each side a different wind
Came, and with a circle twined
All they caught in their embrace,
Lift they in the airy space,

Leaves and sticks and curling sand
Formed, I trow, a pillar grand,
Whirling, moaning, it did soar
Five-score feet, perchance, or more!

The wizard gazed in startled mood,
Spell-bound, motionless he stood;
If he ventured to proceed,
Who could tell his fate, indeed,
As the vortex high did tower,
If he came within its power?
It might wreathe him to the sky,
In the dizzy fall to die.
Still it was a picture fair,
Albeit hazardous to dare.
The while mine host the wizard's awe,
With easy, inward triumph saw,
"Be not disturbed," spoke he, "I pray,
These things must happen in our way,

'Tis perchance a natural cause,
Left from Earth's primeval laws,
Oft the vision doth appear,
In the fairy noontide here;
Old men look at it, and pray,
Maidens from it turn away,
It were vain to question more,
If it tells some tale of yore;
Quickly will the wind subside,
E'en a little moment bide!"

Still the sticks in airy space
Waltzing, buoyant, kept their place,
Ah me, 'twas curious to view
How the dancing fragments flew!
A minute more the gusty shade,
Weary, sighing, 'gan to fade,
The sand in dusty sparkles fell,
Leaves and climbing sticks, as well,

Broken was the winding stair,
Melted into empty air.
All was o'er; not yet, I ween,
The wizard such a thing had seen,
"This mystic land," mused he, "how strange,
Each step is ever fraught with change,
Its people too, how very odd!"
Perchance his guide he fancied God.
Again the way the landlord led,
Behind our eager hero sped,
A moment stopped he on the shore,
Where blew the whirlwind grim before,
A hollow round was all it left,
Its twisting arms had faintly cleft,
Yet 'twas token fair and true,
No dreamy spectre he did view.

They crossed the bridge, still fair, I ween,
Was woodland lake and meadow green.

On the landlord chatted gay,
"Soon," said he, "will end our way,
Wizard, wherefore silent now?
Why so pale thy sunny brow?
Thou, who late so long hast pined,
Trace of Eden old to find,
Wouldst the toiled-for pathway shun,
When the goal is nearly won?"
Trees and flowers grew around,
Sunlight gladdened all the ground,
Not a speck was in the sky,
Yet was sad the wizard's eye.
Ah, perchance, the wood-nymphs bold
Still thy roving fancies hold!
Hark! what crash the still doth break?
Earth and air and mountains quake.
So the thunderbolt doth peal,
Yet in sunshine how unreal!
The wizard felt him almost blind,
The light he saw not, but divined,

His fearless jaguars broke and ran,
They had not the sense of man.

"Pooh!" the landlord quickly said,
"Trust me, naught is there to dread,
'Tis St. John's most blessed day,
Nature mourns till eve is gray,
Marvels come and disappear,
Is wont the sky to drop a tear.
Here we are upon the tree,
Life and death brought thee and me."
Heavens and Earth! what sweet perfume
Gave the coy reviving bloom!
Fruits hung on its branches too,
Large and round, and fair to view,
"Eat, nor fear," the landlord said,
"See its pulp of gorgeous red!"
Scarce conscious, yet the wizard saw,
In doubt, in rapture and in awe,

And of the offering partook,
Its taste was pleasant as its look ;
A craven were he to forbear,
Though bold it was, perchance, to dare,
The fruit seemed of the orange kind,
Bright, albeit with greener rind,
Surpassing it fourfold in size,
Seducing, witching to the eyes.

He gazed,—Oh, fortune strange and fair,
If wisdom's tree indeed was there!
In mystic ages lost till now!
I wis was radiant his brow,
And much he wished to think it true,
Nor empty fancy of his view—
The while he must perforce revere
The knowledge of his brother seer!
So will a father on his first-born gaze,
In love, devotion and amaze,

And own how little is his lore,
For surely heaven doth know more.
Thoughts crowded on his dazzled brain,
Of pride, and ecstasy, and pain;
If clue indeed his quest repaid,
Of Eden's fairy, blissful shade,
What wonder if his joy was more
Than ever mortal felt before!
Then mused he, "If was here the site
Where sinful Eve erst saw the light,
The tree of life," he argued well,
"Must too, nor widely distant dwell,
Then need the secret not be told
How parried death the wood-nymphs bold."

Again the vision sought his mind,
"Immortality may yet I find!"
Like many a one of this dull earth,
Abashed at his ignoble birth,

And would to greater knowledge soar
Than e'er was gift of man before!
No evil on his act did wait,
Because the luscious fruit he ate;
Its ancient charm was gone, I trow,
Its sweetness only left for now,
The lovely, bitter cup of yore
A shade had fallen to, no more!
Traveller, heed the wizard's lay,
'Tis no tale of every day.
Perchance had pleased the reader too,
The olden, fatal tree to view.
Now look within the wizard's soul,
As back Time's progress he would roll;
Fair Eden to his fancy came,
The serpent's guile and Adam's shame.
What mockery of the happy past,
To look upon its ghost at last!
He doubted not that it was there
First lived the loving, fated pair.

And pale he muttered to the air—
Mayhap it was unconscious prayer.
No vulgar pen may picture true
The spell that o'er the wizard grew,
To think the promise of his host
Had been no empty, vapid boast!
Then mused he, "It doth seem a lie
That people here were meant to die,
Else why this soft and fragrant clime,
Fit only to be sung in rhyme,
If it was only for a while,
We should enjoy its sunny smile?
Sweet shadow of repressed delight,
E'en as of old serenely bright!
How opposite to this fair page,
In other zones our heritage!
Where many only live to mourn,
And ever ask why were they born,
Nor know that faith and venture bold
May guide them still to Eden old,

If like me, o'er ocean's tide
They would seek it far and wide!
Here doth wait them sweet reprieve
From the duller earth they leave,—
Come, 'tis nothing but a sail,
Speed ye will the favoring gale!"

Fair one whom enchantment's page
Is wont thy fancy to engage,
Hearken to the wizard's rhyme,
Of the ancient, vanished time!
Old man, e'en to thee I say
Do not throw the book away,
Albeit all too strange may seem
The tenor of its mystic dream.
Again the merry landlord spoke,
The wizard's revery was broke,—
"Come, friend," said he, "'tis late, I trow,
E'en will we have some dinner now."

Ah me! how changed the olden hour
Since when in that alluring bower,
Erst hunger was no care!
The wizard looked his last adieu,
The tree they left for others' view,
So baleful, yet so fair.
Naught happened in their homeward road,
In silent mood the wizard strode,
And still his cheek was pale,
Scarce word he offered to his guide,
Who chatted gaily by his side,
Along the fairy trail.

Ye who love tradition sage,
And seek the wisdom of each age,
The wizard's heart divine!
'Tis not indeed for me to say
What visions in his mind did play,
Let other task be mine!

It is enough for me to do,
The mystic text to render true,
Of this old, curious lay,
And if fate wills it I succeed,
Then those who may the legend read
Need naught against me say.
Again our hero sat within
The little parlor of the inn,
As safe as in the morn ;
Meat, minced and fried, the very best,
Soon laid mine host before his guest,
And bread of Indian corn.
"Now eat, my friend," spoke he, "nor say
Too much I tasked thy strength to-day,
By recent travel worn."
And to complete the fair repast,
Coffee as well he brought at last,
Nor wished the wizard more.
He begged his host excuse to spare,
He never had a walk so rare,
In all his life before.

The wizard's muse more tranquil grew,
He questioned not his host was true,
And once again the hope to find
The tree of life assailed his mind.
Then quick his first reserve he broke,
And to the merry landlord spoke—
"Pardon me, friend," said he, "but tell,
Waked hast thou thoughts I cannot quell,
And to a kindred soul like thee
I dare e'en to unburthen me;
Long have I watched, and sought in vain
For Eden's trace o'er hill and plain;
Say, then, if e'er I can repay
The debt I owe to thee to-day!
Yet more I ask—the fairy theme
Comes ever in my nightly dream,
And marvel is it none, I trow,
If more I think of it just now.
Canst guess, perchance, what fate befell
The tree of life when Adam fell?

If withered it 'neath Azrael's ray,
Who wept its premature decay,
Or when the deluge swept the earth,
Lived still the tree of sacred birth?

"What time the roaring waters dried,
Methinks might bloom again its pride,
Why lifts it not its stem still here,
Since wisdom's tree doth grow so near?"
"Oh fie!" the learned landlord said,
"The tree of life is surely dead,
Its fruit was only meant for two,
For many it would never do;
When Eve was tempted, all was o'er,
Its branches never blossomed more!
Its sap dried up—the balmy dew
Was vain its fragrance to renew,
And long before the deluge came,
It dropped in languor and in shame,

No more to grace the garden fair,
Since sinned the loving, guilty pair.
Ah, me! if it survived their fall,
The world would never hold us all,—
Let others pine to live for aye,
My choice would rather be to die,
Than find myself, with all my race,
Packed close within so small a space,
Like figs set in a drum so fast,
Each one hath lost its shape at last!"

The wizard laughed, nor could he less,
To hear his host's facetiousness;
And to the truth at once he woke,
His airy castle all was broke;
Yet as conviction on him stole,
His chagrin he could scarce control,
To lose his cherished dream was pain,
Just when he thought his quest to gain,

Nor was his disappointment more
When erst the Elves mocked him before.
Ye whom fortune hath deceived,
Judge if was the wizard grieved;
The tree he would again restore
To wicked mortals was no more;
And dreaded he the landlord's eye,
Who must his pride and weakness spy;
Yet had he learnt a lesson wise,
Call not unhappy him who dies!
Then to the ground his vision fell,
"The hopes that led me on, farewell!
Ah! yet still renown may say
The ventures of my weary way,
Critics, pray your censure hold,
Toiled I not alone for gold.

Near where the tree of life decayed,
Perchance unwittingly I strayed."

Yet still pursued the wizard's brain
The theme, "I ever toil in vain,
Each day a promise new bestows,
The morrow only brings me woes;
Yet to the king my word I gave,
For gold the venturous sea to brave;
Aught must I do to keep my fame,
Else fear I perished hath my name."
Then full of mazy thought, said he,
"Thanks, friend, for what thou tellest me,
A sage thou art, who hath indeed
Convinced me of my erring creed;
And even do I blush to say
How I was crazed until to-day.
Now must I on the chase resume,
Through glen and glade, and woodland bloom;
But, ere I leave, one question more,
Through earth I seek for golden ore;
Dost know if I can find it here,
In brook or mountain, far or near?

Since life of mortal is so brief,
'Twill cure me of a load of grief."

The sage replied, nor told him more,
Than erst the friars black before,
Or in his pathway, further wide,
The Indians of the sable tide,
Whence tracked he the fair wood-nymphs bold,
Whose only answer was to scold.
" Fain would I serve thee, friend," he said,
" But it is useless all, I dread,
And as for me, I miss it not,
Where then seek it, and for what?
My little inn requites me well,
And antidotes at times I sell,
Against bite of snake they are so sure,
All know the virtue of my cure;
I pity thee, nor can I say
What luck may help thee on thy way;

It were waste of time to me indeed
To sigh for wealth I do not need.
Wherefore thy haste to leave so soon?
And rain is in the changing moon;
It is comfortless, I do avow,
To cross the muddy creeks just now;
Yet if thou must, God speed thy way
No further will I bid thee stay.

Yet warning heed, for it is bold
To travel o'er the lonely wold,
And unawares thy careless feet
Perchance may deadly reptiles meet;
A little bottle of my ware
Will more avail thee than quack prayer;
Then take my humble gift with thee,
And, if it serves, remember me!
I would not have thy life take wing
From poisonous serpent's cruel sting;

And if thou be preserved to find
The gold that hovers o'er thy mind,
Mayhap some day thou'lt let me know
The happy issue of thy woe;
Much will it please me if indeed
To fortune should thy future lead."
The mystic drink the wizard took,
Untold till then in mortal book,
And once again pursued his road,
Through brier and dreary wilds he strode,
The while upon his well-bred host,
I trow, his startled thoughts were most,
Enough he had seen—nor sought he more
Conviction of the landlord's lore.

Thus with his jaguars by his side,
He still pursued his journey wide,—
And much he marvelled on his way
At all his fortune till that day.

Safe in a pocket of his coat
He kept the little antidote,
And well had liked, I trow, to sift
The potent secret of the gift,
If 'twas distilled from bean or flower,
Or whence its rare and certain power.
Ah! happy thought! might not it be
Still something of the holy tree,
Of which the merry landlord knew,
But told to no one where it grew?
He almost wished then to retrace
His steps back to the sage's place,
And further ask of him to name
Whence the healing liquid came.
Still mused he, "Future time will do,
E'en now I must my pathway sue."
Perchance he felt a touch of fear
To importune again the seer,
So on he went, through stone and brake,
Until he stumbled on a lake,

" The very one I saw before
When last to Ringdove's vale I bore ;
And in the midst lay a fair isle,
At distance of, perchance, a mile,—
The same—methinks I see it now,
I gazed on from the mountain's brow,
The while afar a city bright
Beamed on me in the morning light,
Enamelling the plain,
Where erst I made a fleeting stay,
And the young king did help my way
To sue for my domain."
The wizard stayed awhile to gaze,
His look the fairy scene must praise,
No fabled lake was it indeed,
Its dimples, and its watery weed,
Thus cumbering his way,
Vapors none were in the air,
So sat the pensive wizard there,
Content, perforce, to stay.

No boat upon the shore did wait
Expectant, ready for a freight,—
And was the passage wide;
Yet still he rested on the ground,
And looked upon the lake around
That slept without a tide.

An hour or more he thus did stay,
But still he must pursue his way—
So, keeping by the balmy shore,
Again the gentle mead he wore,
With noiseless step he quick did glide,
His jaguars trotted by his side,
A weary walk it was indeed,
But naught the wizard seemed to heed,—
Nor once he cared his pace to mend,
Until he reached the water's end.
Then on dry land he gaily passed
Safe to the other side at last.

Three leagues at least he travelled o'er,
Another, it had tired sore,—
He found him on a beaten road,
As many donkeys' footprints showed,
The same I pressed in after day,
E'en as 'tis pictured in his lay.
For it did guide to that sweet vale,
The burthen of my honest tale,
The wizard cared not to be seen,
He loved best the woodland green,
Still upon the way he sped,
He knew not to where it led.

The sun declined as on he strode,
Now up the mountain is his road ;
Rocks he looked at on his way,
For an instant he did stay
To see if they were gold or clay ;
Naught he found his hopes to cheer,

"Bah!" exclaimed the dauntless seer.
What demon helped him up the steep?
Indeed, he almost seemed to leap.
Ah! never yet did mortal climb,
Like him, the hero of my rhyme!
Where beast had faltered to ascend,
The mighty wizard scorned to bend;
None but the goat, or chamois light,
Had scrambled thus the dizzy height;
The while, he was as much at home
As if o'er flowers he did roam,
Without a check, on even ground,
Lull'd by every fairy sound;
And ever kept his temper gay,
Nor rested by the dreary way.
Evening threw its shade around,
Still the wizard up did bound,
The moon peeped o'er the mountain top,
Vain as well to make him stop.

With winged step he still did climb,
Though late, he heeded not the time,
Perchance 'twas midnight when he found
His road adown the mountain wound,
Well lit his track the silver moon,
To travellers the fairest boon.
'Twas cold, but felt the wizard none,
He never missed the absent sun ;
His walk had made him so perspire,
He thought not e'en to light a fire.
Still was it but a lonely way,
E'en duller in that olden day.
Just had he passed, as on he led,
A cross trail on the road he sped;
Sudden a trotting noise behind
Varied the tenor of his mind,
And, as he turned, he wondered more,
A pack of mules upon him bore,
A merry troop, each with its load,
A mounted convoy by them rode ;

Four native men, unarmed indeed,
Yet seemed they fit for hardy deed,
For cloak each wore a blanket red,
With centre opening for the head,

(As down the mountain they did wreathe
They well could hold their reins beneath),
And wide straw hats of texture plain,
To parry off the sun and rain.
"Now," thought the wizard, "will I know
To where this winding path doth go.
Good even!" said he to the band,
"'Tis well to have a friend at hand
When one is doubtful of his way;
Whither tend we? tell me, pray!"
I trow did stare the stranger train
To see him and his jaguars twain;
Yet one as spokesman for the rest
With courteous word the seer address'd.

"Ah! know you not, fair sir," said he,
"E'en near we now a rare country;
Perchance, before to-morrow's eve
No more your venturous soul will grieve;
Then will you rub, mayhap, your eye
And say, enchanted, Where am I?
For 'tis a happy vale indeed
To where this crooked lane doth lead,
Stay by us, if it be your will,
Soon will we overtop each hill!"

Then zigzag downward still they went,
Climbing anon some rough ascent,
The sturdy wizard was more gay
To have companions for his way;
Nor knew he who his friends might be,
Enough they showed him courtesy.
At length night's curtain fair withdrew,
The dawn appeared with rosy hue,

The pale moon looked her last farewell,
And green was every mountain dell.
The morning breeze was sweet to breathe,
As saw they each bright scene beneath,
With here and there a silver stream,
Gentle, passing as a dream,
And cattle drinking at the rill,
Or seeking pasture on the hill.
Naught is so fair as rising day
Breaking o'er the traveller's way,—
Fairer in that mystic clime,
Where forever 'tis springtime!
All was beauty to the eye,
Clear the gorgeous azure sky,—
As the landscape did unroll,
Joyous was the wizard's soul.

On, on, they went, the day was clear,
See, wanderer, thy goal is near!

Wizard, gaze indeed, and thrill,
From the summit of the hill!
Shades of recent sadness, now,
Vanish from thy troubled brow!
Travel's boon is sweet and fair,
Rove, if you would pleasure share!
Call no more thy journey vain,
Viewing far yon lovely plain!
Ah, how soft its breadth of green,
With a gentle rise serene!
So will faintly swell the deep
When in summer it doth sleep!
Fairy-like, a city there
On its bosom it doth bear,
Towers grace it, high in air,
While below a silken stream
Threw out sparks in Phœbus' gleam;
Verdant tracts of varied shade
Either twining border braid,
Mountains gird the vale around,
Guardians of the magic ground.

Perchance, as mused our hero bold,
He thought not then of silly gold.

Once, or more, the picture true
Of this vale divine I drew,
And it seems in olden time
Scarce it differed from my rhyme,
Yet doth tell the wizard's page
It was fairer in that age,
Ere an earthquake's fatal throe
Partly laid the city low—
The very same, alas! near where
Smiled in the sunshine Marin fair,
E'en in that ancient day—
Awhile the wanderer did look,
Then once again his journey took,
Adown the turning way.
Ere his dreamy story fades,
Or he vanish to the shades,

Fame, that he hath wooed so long,
Crown his pensive, troubled song!
E'en thy brightest garland now,
Wreathe around the sage's brow,
Who thus the venture could pursue,
The hidden, mystic land to view,
Despite the law of other days,
Forbidding there the stranger's gaze!

Still the travellers did wend,
The mountain pathway 'gan to mend,
In smoother guise, no further hill
Broke the fair current of their will.
The loaded mules the way did lead—
It was a motley train indeed!
More happy was, I trow, the seer,
To see his journey's end so near,
The promise of a speedy rest
Again was solace to his breast,

And fairer grew the prospect nigh,
To fix his philosophic eye,
The busy scene of life below,
And people passing to and fro !
But yet when one is most elate,
Who can read the book of fate,
And say my fortune is secure ?
'Tis ever folly to be sure.
Why are the wizard's guides so pale ?
There spoke, indeed, some hidden tale,
As on before, in seeming wait,
A group of soldiers eyed their freight,
And e'en the little band did dare
With marked intent to seize the ware.

No brigands can the party be,
Yet is their bearing stern, ah, me !
As quick with gesture and command,
They bade the travellers to stand,

And one the loaded mules did stay.
"What means the challenge? Who are they?"
The wizard felt no craven fear,
But would he have the outrage clear,
I wis the story did surprise,
"'Twas all illicit merchandise!"
Oh, shame! oh sequel sad indeed!
To prison were his friends decreed.
And must he answer give, besides,
How came he with his lawless guides.
E'en was his farther pathway barred
Till he had satisfied the guard,
"Who was he? and his purpose what?
If smuggler like the rest or not?"
Still evident it was they knew
He did not number with the crew.
Excuse the soldiers offered fair,
"We act by warrant of the mayor;"
The while his pets their eye engaged,
They wondered that they were not caged.

Wizard, now thy honor save,
Lest thou, too, be held a knave!
So, I wis, he did not quail,
But briefly told his simple tale,
When by the sweet moon's silver light
The men o'ertook him in the night,
And unsuspecting who they were,
He did with them his travel share;
Else had the way been lone indeed,
Nor knew he where his path did lead—
And straight his regal pass he showed,
To which the law obedience owed.
It was enough, the soldier band
The rare and graven parchment scanned,
And with approving word withdrew,
With them went the smuggler crew.
The wizard waited e'en a while,
Till they had gone perchance a mile,
And ere had set the golden sun
He found he had the valley won,

But still the city distant lay,
Too far, I trow, to reach that day;
And when he got to Marin fair,
Soft toll'd within the vesper prayer.

Thought he, "E'en will I here request,
Ere I go on, a little rest,
And lodging for the coming night,
For surely fades the little light,
And to proceed is vain."
Before him (as it still may bide)
A fairy rivulet did glide,
On either bank grew cane.
He quick his feet from shoes did free,
And with his breeches to the knee
The further shore did gain.
To right and left, in goodly show,
Fair willows tall stood in a row,
'Twas "Marin's" verdant lane.

Through this up to the house he pass'd,
The sable thralls looked on aghast,
Nor said, "Be welcome here!"
And one white man who seemed the host
A braver heart could scarcely boast,
For quaked he, too, in fear.
But "Nay!" the dauntless hero cried,
"Rather pity me than chide,
No foe, indeed, am I,
But gleaner of the wood and wold;
'Tis late, to push my way were bold,
To-night I here would lie."

Then said he of complexion fair,
"I pray thee, sir, excuses spare,
Our door, I trow, is ever free
To learned strangers such as thee."
The host he was who thus did speak,
Albeit with accents faint and meek,

And though he bade his guest a chair,
'Twas plain he wished the sage elsewhere;
Still supper had he, and a bed,
To cover were his jaguars led—
A slave their simple wants supplied,
And e'en to praise their beauty tried;
For comely were the two indeed,
A spotted match in strength and speed;
Perchance he would have liked it well
To hunt with them the shady dell,
For game o'er Marin did abound,
And lions oft did prowl around,
If these would cheat them of their prey
They surely had been kept at bay.
One late, 'twas only yester-morn,
A donkey to the wood had borne,
The victim's body there was found,
Mangled and bloody on the ground.

Prince Ringdove's sire then did bide,
An able man, at Marin's pride,

'Twas him, the very same indeed,
Who lodged the wizard in his need,
A hypocrite was he.
Our hero could not say for sure
If 'twas his own or by tenure,
If was he a lessee;
Nor oft, I trow, do travellers care,
When find they on their way good fare,
To whom is due their board,
But praise the one who welcome gave,
Nor wont the question are to crave
If be he serf or lord.
The fact is he was solely there
To manage Marin broad and fair
As agent or trustee,
(My ancestor being then away)
To keep the place in the delay
Till from the main came he.
Thus will the wizard's book mislead
E'en now all those his page do read,
For err he did, 'tis plain;

Yet Ringdove's son the work would claim,
And e'en the learned writer blame,
And of his doubt complain.

The weary wizard slept so well,
Naught his drowsiness could quell,
And never waked till morning's ray
Within his room had found its way.
He quickly dressed and would be gone,
His host was waiting on the lawn—
But "Nay!" he said, "e'en tarry still,
Till thou hast seen my sugar-mill,
And breakfast will at once be made,
The table is already laid!"
Thus pressed, what meant his dreamy speed,
Uncivil had it been indeed,
So with the host he walked the ground,
And in the mill-house all around,
E'en, as in after days, did I,
His story with my own will vie,

Though his was of time far away,
And mine is of more recent day.
The slaves were busy planting cane,
For future day a golden gain;
Their sable forms shone in the light,
As though strange offspring of the night;
Their quarters too the wizard viewed,
E'en like a soldier's dwelling rude.

An aqueduct, begun but late,
Did boast as well the fair estate,
To bring the water from the hill,
And turn the iron sugar-mill.
It was an undertaking great,
Foiled, anon, by act of fate;
Ah! human hope is all in vain!
The earthquake broke the work in twain;
Then toiled the skilful masons, glad,
To-day 'tis but a ruin sad—

For still it stands, by moss o'ergrown,
A monument of useless stone!
Near by an orchard filled the air
With balmy perfumes, sweet and rare,
And much it took the wizard's eye,
Though as he gazed 'twas with a sigh.
Perchance his troubled fancy flew
Back to the greenwood elves anew—
Whom recollection still must claim,
In love, and terror, and in shame!
Though to leave them was reprieve,
When shall memory cease to grieve?
Ever doth the spell remain,
Who will cast it from his brain?

A court there was, of goodly space,
Around which lodged the sable race;
Here to their early meal the throng
Soon came with jest and mirthful song,

And on the ground in couples sat—
I wis was poor their hairy mat,
Nor better carpet could provide
For each, fair Marin, than a hide.
The learned wizard thought it rare,
How came the Eastern fashion there?
From out a clumsy earthen plate,
Black beans with bacon boiled they ate;
A caterer in the midst did stand,
With wooden ladle in his hand,
And gaily helped each hungry man,
He was as dingy as the clan.
It had beguiled thee, reader, too,
To see him deal the native stew,
From smoking pot—say if 'twas vast,
Where eighty slaves appeased their fast!
Ye were indeed a happy crew,
Ere war did bring ye teachings new!
And mused the wizard, "Would I were
Myself the lord of Marin fair!"

He built him fancies in the air,
"What joy to bide forever there!
And rule the noble, broad domain,
Rich with its fields of sugar-cane;
What folly to recross the sea,
Could there his future dwelling be!"
And paled, alas! the haughty seer,
To think his homeward sail so near,
When pleasures past he must forego,
To live in never-ending woe!
Sudden his reverie was broke,
A shy and youthful accent spoke—
"Please, sirs," the word a negress gave,
"The breakfast doth your presence crave!"
The host and he the maid obey,
I think I see them e'en to-day—
There in a paved corridor,
With broad white colonnade before,
In contrast sat the two;

'Twas even there where yester-eve
The host the wanderer did receive,
When dim the twilight grew;
The host was bony, thin and tall,
The sage you would have fancied small!

The wizard ate with right good will,
Of claret bright he drank his fill,
As was the custom there;
E'en gave him a cigar mine host,
Truly its essence he could boast,
So sweet it was and rare;
Yet vain the effort was to hide
The fear that in his soul did bide,
And though he would his guest regale,
His inward tremors kept him pale,
And gave his words the lie.
Still naught the wizard seemed to see—
His tranquil heart from guile was free,
And merry was his eye.

Then quoth our hero, "Tell me, friend,
Ere from thy side my steps I bend,
Canst say if here is gold?
This virgin land I do aver,
Nor can I in my fancy err,
The yellow dust must hold."
"Gold! none is here," the host replied,
"No mines have we but meadows wide,
Excess, indeed, it were.
The coin we use comes from abroad;
We burn no incense to the god,
Yet wealth have we to spare.

In yonder town, who knows, indeed,
May better luck thy footsteps speed,
For there our wisest men do bide,
And daily papers may thee guide.
I'm sorry, though my will is good,
I cannot aid thee as I would;

Yet chide me not, nor think it strange,
'Tis rarely spoke of, e'en on 'Change,
And people deem the query plain,
'Tis best to buy it with their grain."
The host knew scarcely what he said,
He so the sorcerer did dread.
Nor longer would our hero bide,
But bade his jaguars to his side;
"Good day, my friend," he gaily said,
"May fortune fair thy future wed!"
And down the avenue of trees,
That bended with the morning breeze,
He started on his way.
The sable vassals 'round did cheer,
But naught their livid chief did hear,
Nor bade him e'en adieu.
Long doleful years 'tis since the seer,
From Marin broad withdrew,

Tradition says that from that day,
Fair Marin's host, till then so gay,
Had lost, alas! his head!

For if a steed, or white or grey,
With dark spots on it, crossed his way,
He ever turned and fled;
And e'en his son the weakness caught,
Thus by his timid sire taught—
It renders legends poor—
And yellow dogs would make him pale,
Nor prayer nor specific could avail
The stricken man to cure!
"Who could the daring sorcerer be,"
Mused they, "had crossed the guarded sea
And sought a shelter there?
Nor chose the secret to confess,
He knew who Marin did possess,
Although, perchance, aware?"
His visit was indeed a theme
To haunt them ever like a dream,
E'en as a thing unreal;
Yet when his tale they did peruse,
Albeit his name they did abuse,
It did their conscience steel.

On the wizard pushed his way,
Hill and tree and mead were gay;
Then, perchance, within his brain
He framed the story of this strain;
As the sweet, secluded vale
Seemed indeed a fairy tale.
Still the people, as he sped,
Wondered what was in his head;
Though his jaguars were so fair,
'Twas no Christian hunting pair;
That he was from foreign land
They could easily understand;
Still the wizard onward strode,
Nor aught he heeded on the road,
As the city nearer drew,
O'er his mind new fancies grew.
"Alas!" thought he, "I have no gold,
Vain my travels o'er the wold!
Wisdom's tree is but a shade,
A picture for the pensive maid—

The tree of life, that held my dreams,
As well a phantom only seems,
At most an antidote to spite
The wrath of wicked serpent's bite!

Still many now will cease to grieve,
I vow 'tis something to retrieve,
To parry death e'en for a while
And laugh at snakes' impotent guile,
And future critics may, perchance,
O'er my humble pages glance
And laud my weary ventures long,
That could bequeath this useful song."
And felt the wizard for his charm
To see it had not come to harm.
So musing, on he boldly sped,
And through the city's streets did tread—
It was a large and handsome town,
Prettier ere it half fell down,

With stately houses snowy white,
Fair though dazzling to the sight;
It struck him, as it erst did me,
The windows iron-barred to see,
Through which, with doubtful look amazed,
Bright glances on the stranger gazed,
Each pile was like a lovely jail,
E'en as will tell my own true tale.
A spacious inn soon bade him stay,
Ere far he picked his pensive way—
The inn I after saw as well,
It stood when meaner dwellings fell.

"Who's there!" I wis 'twas marvel rare
To see the sage, though spoke he fair—
Some half-clad children ran inside,
No wonder if they screamed and cried;
Yet lest the host his pets should blame,
He did assure him they were tame,
And more to chase his look distressed,

He each with gentle hand caressed,
As though but household kittens they,
Untaught for cruel sylvan fray.
Still answer came, "Whoe'er thou be,
This, friend, is no menagerie!
From thought to lodge the beasts here cease,
I pray thou wilt depart in peace!"
It needed all the wizard's skill
To move the craven landlord's will,
And e'en 'twas with reluctant grace
He deigned at last to give them place;
But that the inn just then was bare,
Our hero had not found such care—
Scarce pressed a guest its empty halls,
Or gazed upon the storied walls;
Thus poverty the soul will brace
To look e'en on the devil's face.

Wizard, rest again a while
'Neath that fairy city's smile!

His rooms were on the upper floor,
With window to the street before,
Yet sole was dreamy quiet there,
Though fountains decked the thoroughfare.
O'er the housetops, lofty, fair
Rose a grey church-tower square,
With St. Peter's image blest,
Airy, gilded, o'er the crest.
Lo! in one hand's tiny fold
The keys of heaven it did hold,
Godlike did the fabric soar,
Read the wizard's pages o'er!
Since then, e'en that holy fane
Yield must to the earthquake's strain,
Of its pride one-third was broke,
When the demon's wrath awoke.
Ah! I hear the people's cry,
Wails of anguish rend the sky,
Swaying, ere the fatal fling,
More its dizzy force to wing,

Far within the temple's square
Fell the fragment through the air!

Lo! the many flee in fear,
To the open valley near.
There, in rude style 'neath rustic shed,
They made their temporary bed.
For quaked with shocks the city still,
And houses tumbled down the hill—
The world, alas! was at an end,
Else, what might omens such portend?
The beauty of the town was gone,
And chasms in the earth did yawn;
Some oped, but to again unite,
And victims writhed within their bite,
The while, loud noises under ground,
More the dire panic crowned.
A month or more that passed away,
Still kept the terror of that day;

And till three years sped to their end,
None thought the temple broke to mend:
At length the ruin as it stood,
The masons partly rendered good—
Rounding the summit as of yore,
But its old height was never more!
St. Peter's image they replaced,
Where its footstool erst it graced,
Thus I saw it in my day,
Half its grandeur sunk away!
Though maimed, 'tis an imposing tower,
Suggestive of past ancient power.

Well, to my tale, ere more I stray
From the tenor of this lay,
Nor lose in gloomy horror vain
The even texture of my strain,
But safely guide the beamy thread
Through the mystic path it led.
Wizard, love me from the grave,
That would thee from oblivion save!

E'en though may many not believe,
Still o'er thy sorrows shall they grieve,
And ask in wonder, was it true,
So many perils passed he through?
We left him at the empty inn,
Whose shelter 'twas a task to win;
There, sweet repose and fancies fair,
In hopeful pleasures 'whelmed his care,
And every zephyr soft that blew
Waked in his soul a rapture new.
Who than I may better tell
The joy his recent shame could quell!
For though destruction after toiled
To 'whelm the city—fate was foiled,
And lovely even in decay,
It was the oasis of my way.

The wizard at the window gazed,
And aye the dreamy prospect praised,
All was beautiful and new—
When hark! a distant clarion blew!

He bent him listful to the sound,
As thrice the brazen horn was wound,
Each time more near, the lively strain
Found echo in his pensive brain,
Though it was a martial air,
Never music was so fair;
Signal, doubtless, breathed the blast,
"Stranger hath our threshold past!"
To the weary reader, say,
Is not welcome tuneful lay?
Ask then of the careworn seer
If he loved the notes to hear!
"Ah!" thought he, "'tis home again,
To leave the wild and fearful glen;
Ee'n now the silver trump of fame
Seems gently murmuring my name.
What softness here! I do avow
I never felt so well as now!"
Say if was the city fair,
When the wizard bold was there!

Next day in state the Governor came,
And citizens of noble name;
The bishop too, with humble ear,
His tale of venturous quest to hear—
For quick as ray of light did glide
The rumor that he there did bide,
'Twas solace once again to see
So genial a company!
Yet of his fortunes 'tis not clear
What fractions chose to tell the seer,
Save that his weary travel bold
Had not repaid his toil with gold.
"Through perils never trod before,"
Said he, "my wearied pathway bore—
Alas! were I the truth to tell,
Perchance you would not listen well.
So would the wonders of my way
Excel the wildest fairy lay,
Still vain my hope and honest zeal,
The care that led me on to heal;

The yellow idol I would trace
Hid ever from my empty chase;
I trow 'tis pleasure to regain
The comforts of an inn again!

What dreadful snakes hissed on my way
I will not tire you now to say—
Suffice it that, I know not why,
I could elude their burning eye.
Yet was not danger all my meed;
Fair beauteous tracts, I roved indeed,
Oft 'neath the shade of leafy tree,
I felt I could not happier be—
And lo! I bring, unknown before,
A charm will fleeting life restore—
If reptile's sting the cause should be
Would wrest the vital spark from thee;
A specific more rare than gold,
For health is neither bought nor sold.

Far, far I rambled, till one day
I sought repose from Phœbus' ray.
A little town beyond I saw,
To which I later on did draw;
An old man, whom I stayed with there,
Regaled me with the essence fair,
And bade me of the truth be sure,
A serpent's death-stroke it would cure."
Thus as he spoke the hero sage
Produced from his coat the mystic gage.

Quick the eager chemists wise
The subtle drink did analyze,—
Spell divine 'twas none, in brief,
But juice of verdant native leaf.
A damsel fair, an hour before,
A wanton snake had bitten sore,
The thought to heal her was in vain,
Ah! who may lull her dying pain?

Yet when she took the potent draught,
Oh, happy day! the maiden laughed!
Wizard, thou hast won thy game,
Cast away thy recent shame!
Fairy tale of monster slain,
Breaking virgin's captive chain,
Still were wondrous less to read
Than that mystic, touching deed!
Indian charmers, hush your lore,
The seer had taught ye something more;
I trow, then, each with earnest note
Did laud the precious antidote,
For serpents there did so abound
They filled the mead and wood around,
And stung was some one every day,
Nor aught their certain death could stay.

Thus the scourge was swept away
That smote the land from olden day,

Even like a gloomy spell
That lurked by brooklet and in dell.
St. Patrick, who, where'er he passed,
Bade each reptile breathe its last,
Or he, the Grecian hero true,
That erst the baleful Hydra slew,
Protect your votary, the sage;
Fame, oh spare for him a page!
Again is glad the fairy vale,
The shepherd is no longer pale,
And cotters stray where ne'er before,
And bless the wizard's sylvan lore!
To give the antidote a name,
In learned council, Doctors came—
The charm that poison so could curb
Was called after its parent herb,
And though since then an age hath flown,
As "Guaco" still the cure is known.
Never sorcerer before
So dazzled as our seer of yore,

And mused he, "Lucky day for me
I got a pass for this country!"

Still gold the thirsty wizard sought,
But of it none could tell him aught,
Save that in lands far south away,
In yellow veins its treasures lay,
So must he be, perforce, content,
And rest from further vain intent.
Then mused he, "Wherefore let regret
Or disappointment make me fret!
Albeit my quest I have not won,
My duty to the king is done;
And here renown doth laud my care,
I trust with him as well to fare!"
Thus to the winds he freely gave
The aim that nursed him o'er the wave;
And in the city fair he strove
To stay from future thought to rove.

Yet though fair maidens tried their best
To wake new fires in his breast,
And much he loved with them to toy,
He kept aloof from Venus' boy.
The woodland elves, perchance, his soul
E'en in that hour did control,
Or else, ere he set out to roam,
Mayhap he lost his heart at home.

Time passed e'en like a fairy ray,
The wizard could not move away;
The while with fêtes and pic-nics gay,
The town regaled him every day.
For he had come like angel fair
To heal the grieving people's care,
And once a bull-fight's pageant rare
Beguiled his drowsy leisure there.
How careless looked the matador,*
As on the glaring foe he bore!

* Swordsman who faces and kills the bull.

And baiters did their art display,
In brighter habiliments were they,
Each wore blue breeches to the knee,
With silken stockings fair to see,
And silver buttons in the vest,
I vow they gallantly were dressed.
Their bonnets small were graceful too,
Like turbans, but of sable hue;
And braided jackets fitting loose,
To give the tutored arm free use.
The wizard's heart was in the game,
Yet was the play not free from blame,
When winced a mounted picador *
As from his steed the blood did pour,
Bah! he would be in the wold,
Hunting with his jaguars bold.

Another day a hamlet near,
Which spreading trees around did cheer,

* Spearman who teases the bull.

Drew him from his lonely hall
To see a yearly festival,
For all upon the sage would peer,
Who raised the sick from hopeless bier.
The village church was newly dressed,
Sweet flowers graced the altar blessed;
And dances on the velvet ground
Bade rustic maiden's heart to bound.
Hark! the rural green is gay,
'Tis their sainted patron's day!
Yet was the simple music rare,
The wizard only saw it there;
Scarce suited to a queenly court,
So unassuming was its sort.
One on a native drum did rub,
(A parchment-covered little tub),
Another ruder sound, indeed,
Played with a bone on riven reed,
And one with rattle in each hand,
Of large round gourds, made up the band.

Never merrier minstrels three
Won a guerdon or a fee.

Those peaceful scenes at last to leave
Must bid the wizard's heart to grieve;
Yet though he would a while delay,
'Twas peril to protract his stay,
His pass was only for a space,
Perchance ere then had sped its grace,
And strangers must not linger there,
The law against it none did spare.
"Ah! would I had remained at home,
Nor dared the stormy billows' foam,
On this secluded zone to peer,
That holds in chains my spirit here!"
So mused the seer—the thought was pain,
He might not see that land again,—
It was a bitter cup that hour,
When fain he fled the dreamy bower.

Through gales he passed the weary main,
And here doth end the wizard's strain.
His book he printed late abroad,
The wise will still its beauty laud;
Yet some allege he closed his eyes
Beneath those fairy sunny skies,
And that the tomb upon the hill
Doth keep him from oblivion still.

This tomb I saw when in my day
I neared the city on my way,
Half hid in sacred ruins old,
'Mid time's unsparing wasting mould,
Yet little thought I then, indeed,
His wondrous fairy tale to read;
Or how upon my fate it bore,
I knew not of the seer before.
There sleep in peace! may gentle wind
And memory o'er his shade be kind!

Else ever on that land were shame,
That could not honor his fair name,
With all the good that he did bring,
To win the people and the king.
Alas! where are the spotted pair
That erst his lonely path did share?
The sole companions of his way,
And half the music of my lay!
Both died—they missed the wood and lea,
Where late before they wandered free,
Nor could they brook their city jail,
Where all their sylvan joys did fail;
When to their grave his pets were borne,
Say if our hero felt forlorn!

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